OTHER WORLDS
SCIENCE STORIES

ALL-STAR EDITOR ISSUE!

Anthony Boucher
Sam Merwin, Jr.
Paul W. Fairman
Daniel Keyes
Jerome Bixby
John Carnell
James V. Taurasi
Ray Palmer

JUNE 1952

35¢

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OTHER WORLDS SCIENCE STORIES

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James V. Taurasi, who edits **Fantasy-Times,** fandom's ace newsmag, and who is responsible for this issue's legwork.

Daniel Keyes, author of "Robot Unwanted", in this special "editor's issue," and formerly editor of **Marvel Stories.**

Jerome Bixby, former editor of **Planet Stories** is author of "Nightride and Sunrise."

Sam J. Merwin, Jr., formerly editor of **Thrilling Wonder Stories** and **Startling Stories,** wrote "Factor Unknown" for us.

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EDITORIAL

It was quite some time ago when we conceived the idea of presenting an issue of OTHER WORLDS devoted to stories written by science fiction editors, rather than by the writers. Our purpose was to show that the science fiction editor of today is not just a copy-boy, hired to paste up galleys by the publisher, who doesn't, to put it into plain language, know his science fiction from a hole in the ground. Nor has he holes in his head. So, we started asking around to see how many of the "boys" would like to cooperate. And here's where we want to make a few things perfectly clear, so that there will be no misunderstanding.

Included in this issue are only *some* of the science fiction editors, not all! Those who are not included are not there for good reasons, and we'll outline them. 1) Some publishers do not permit, as a matter of company policy, any person employed by them as editor or writer to divert his talents elsewhere. Their argument is that they are not paying by the hour, nor the day, but by the individual. By that we mean the publisher is hiring the *total talent* of the editor in question, and since it is an extremely valuable talent, he guards it jealously. You will see *why* this is so, when you read some of the stories we have printed—these men are tops in their

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field, both as writers and as editors, and the welfare of their various magazines depends on getting every bit of that talent into their respective books. As a rather secondary issue, "outside" work would have to be done at night, and after hours, and an overtired editor is an editor without zip. Also, a story written after a hard day's grind might show lack of quality and hurt the reputation of the writer of that story. So, some editors are missing simply because there is no possible way they can legally or morally grant our rather unusual request. 2) OTHER WORLDS contains 162 pages. Obviously this limits our space. As will be seen, a mere seven of these editors have filled the book. So, some editors who would have appeared here willingly, could not because we had no room for them—and to ask all editors to write a short-short would be ridiculous thing. So, we compromised. In the future, we will publish additional stories by editors, and will label them so. Eventually you will be seeing stories by almost every one of them. We may even have another editor's issue, taking up more of the editors in the field. Actually, it would take more than that to cover the field adequately. 3) Some of these editors have exclusive contracts for their fiction, even when it is outside the company for which they work. One, whose name we will not mention, is a very successful novel writer, and his work is scheduled for years to come, under contract. 4) We are stumped with our serial, which isn't by an editor, but which had to appear anyway. So, S.J. Byrne's second installment of "The Golden Guardsmen" crowds out at least one more editor, 5) If we waited for all the editors we invited, who promised to do stories, we'd probably wait another year before all the manuscripts came in, and we'd never get around to putting out our "special" issue; and we want their stories to remain "fresh" and not outdated by events.

Therefore, this issue of OTHER WORLDS proves editors — *all* of them—can write top science fiction, and those included are representing those not included. They are speaking loudly for all, not just for themselves. And those others who will appear singly, perhaps, in future issues, will only echo the proof here being offered. Besides, what do we do when one of them insists he'll do a short novel! The answer is, we give it to you in OTHER WORLDS as *regular* fare, later on.

So read on—you are in for a real treat. And if you find Ray Palmer absent with a yarn, it's because every one of the boys included can write rings around him. We just got outclassed, that's all! Maybe we can use our story to fill a hole someday.

And now, we're going to say a few things that have been going around in our mind for some time. Ever since we started OW, we've

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been intending to do "things". As a matter of fact, all our friends have been expecting us to do "things". Never mind what — they expect something "extra" from Ray Palmer. Something maybe nuttier than ever done before; something novel; something which smashes a taboo; something that will cause near homicide . . . . But it almost seemed like one of the characters out of a former "novelty", the dero, have been trying to prevent him from getting into high gear. Pretty rotten trick, to paralyze a guy so he can't make his readers happy! Well, one thing after another, and all sorts of troubles—printer trouble, money trouble, health trouble, accident trouble, and so on. Palmer thinks slow. He sits in a coal bin and cogitates. And he comes out looking as if he'd been sitting in a coal bin! But eventually he comes out with an idea. Trouble is, we moved to the country and we burn wood now. No coal bin. No ideas. Carbon is the basis of life; therefore carbon is the basis of ideas—no carbon, no ideas.

Until we found out how to make charcoal! You know how it's done? Get a red hot wood fire, then dump water on it. Eureka, charcoal! Only stand clear, fella, when you dump! It makes with the steam too! Now we got carbon. And we got an idea! A couple ideas!

1.) We've wondered for a long time what to do with one of the top science fiction writers, Richard S. Shaver. You think we're gonna give them bums, them deros, a break, after they play dirty tricks on us, like tripping us down the stairs! Heck no. So what do we do with Shaver? A terrific writer, but we're mad at deros! What a problem. Well, the problem is no more. We have taken Shaver, taken him apart, reassembled — and bingo, we get something new! Something good! Something not true, granted, but *real good!* And comes the next issue, you get to see the beginning of it. The opposite of the Shaver Mystery. The biggest darn *lie* ever told! And one thing we know—it's top science fiction. A story told in the best Shaver manner. 5,000 words that will make Shaver fan and science fiction fan alike grin from ear to ear with sheer enjoyment. We know, because that's what it did to us!

2.) We're gonna go monthly! Not right off, just like that, but we *do* know when! You won't have too long to wait; is all we can tell you right now. We've felt all along that without monthly publication, we can't really get into high gear. Even the editor finds it too long to wait between issues.

3.) We're knocking the walls out! No longer is OW put out in an office in Evanston, the second floor of our country ranchero, a printing plant in Sandusky. It is put out in an arena; an arena bigger than Soldier Field, bigger than Wisconsin, or Illinois, or Ohio. It's put out right in your own amphitheatre!

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Every one of you readers is right in the convention hall where you can carry or smash any motion the editor makes. What this means is very simple; we're going to give you readers a lot bigger voice in OW. We're coming down out of the editor's seat and getting right in the middle of things. This editorial, and the Letters section, will become a two-way television set. And what happens from here on in is *up to you!* Maybe we can have some fun with OW after all! Some of the things that you readers have to say may take us a lot further than you think! You kick-off, and we'll carry the ball—and let the goal posts get out of the way!

First demonstration of this is an idea one of our readers gave us, which we're going to spring on you soon. We would never have thunk of it. Neither would the reader, except he said: "I'd never have written this letter, except to a guy I knew didn't have all his marbles, and naturally *you* are the recipient of it. So here's my idea . . ." Well, to heck with the marbles—the idea got 'em rolling around a little anyway! So, how about some more of you readers taking a few potshots at our marbles? Never can tell what comes of it! After all, Shaver came out of a wastebasket! (Aw, was that nice, you guys? *Nobody* belongs in a wastebasket! Wait'll you read his new novel, and you'll never say *that* again!)

The other day we heard a radio guy blattin' his tonsils out over the air, and he said something about "future" and right away we thought of *Future Fiction,* only he was talking about something else, it turned out. He was saying UMT wouldn't hurt the morals of our young men because they were going to put two times as many chaplains into uniform along with them, to guard against hurting their morals. Now what kind of hot air is that? Ain't military training, training to kill guys? And is that moral? Nuts. UMT is going to be used for National Defense, or anything else it can be used for, and it ain't going to make our boys go around "loving their neighbor" one darn bit. Let's face up to facts and none of this phoney gargle.

What has that got to do with science fiction? Nothing! Not a darn thing. Except it's going to happen in the future. And since when can't a science fiction editor, writer, or reader even *breathe* a political word?

Your editor has an idea politics is a science. Anyway, he thinks it *should* be. Before we go juggling our future, we ought to apply the rigid scientific method, and some good reasoning, to it. Science fiction has pointed the way to almost everything in our present and our future to come, and in the past it has put in some pretty devastating political licks. Only lately with the new governmental mania for "classifying" "top-secreting" "bottom-drawering" and so on, some of us

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readers have got our little "senses of security", our "dependency" on somebody but our own reliant selves, all smeared over our common sense, and we go around whispering—don't *talk* so loud, somebody will *hear* you! Some of us have even suggested *not* talking, unless it's *strictly* minding our own narrow business.

Somebody sees "spaceships in the sky". Flying "saucers". In 1930 we'd have torn the landscape apart rushing around yelling *"Where?"* Now we pull in our necks and mutter: "Maybe it's something *secret* by our government." Yeah, and *maybe* it's *really* space ships! In OW, we give *both* possibilities an equal birth. If it *is* a government secret, we're footing the bill, and we'll do the dying when the shooting begins. That makes it a personal affair, and the government of this country is a personal affair. Who are we afraid of? The Russians? Ourselves? By golly, *that's* it! We're getting to be afraid of our *own* shadows! We're getting into such a super-scientific civilization (just like we've been picturing for 25 years) that our immaturity is showing. We can't *take* it. We're afraid we're gonna blow ourselves up. So we pull in our necks, hunt a hole, and crawl into it! Let's wait until somebody *tells* us to go crawl in a hole, and *then* climb right up his back! This is the good old USA, still a kid among nations, but we got plans for it. And those plans are to grow up to be responsible adults, to stop this eternal fighting, to live in peace, and to love one another!

By the way, who you science fiction fans gonna vote for for president? Taft, Eisenhower, Truman, Kefauver, Joe Blow? Want I should tell you who to vote for? Okay, for a guy who's interested in the future existence of this country, in the future existence of the world, in the future welfare and harmony and happiness and progress of our children. How you gonna find a guy like this? Well, maybe there won't be any guy like that on the ballot—but anyway, vote with your mind, your heart and your guts. Don't vote with your prejudices, with your "party" line, with your fears. Subject the candidates to a good *stf* acid test of reason, demand proof of what he is, and act like a responsible citizen of the empire of mankind. Remember that all over the world, no matter where you go, there are people. Just people.

We science fiction fans even think there are people on other worlds as well. And if one of them ran for president, he'd have to do more than label himself as a democrat or a republican to get our vote. We'd ask him a few direct questions; and we'd ask for proof that voting for him would be smart.

Funny thing, they are still letting science fiction fans vote! Even if we are a bit more broad in a "space-time" sense than the average citizen! Now tell me why we shouldn't *talk* about it?—*Rap.*

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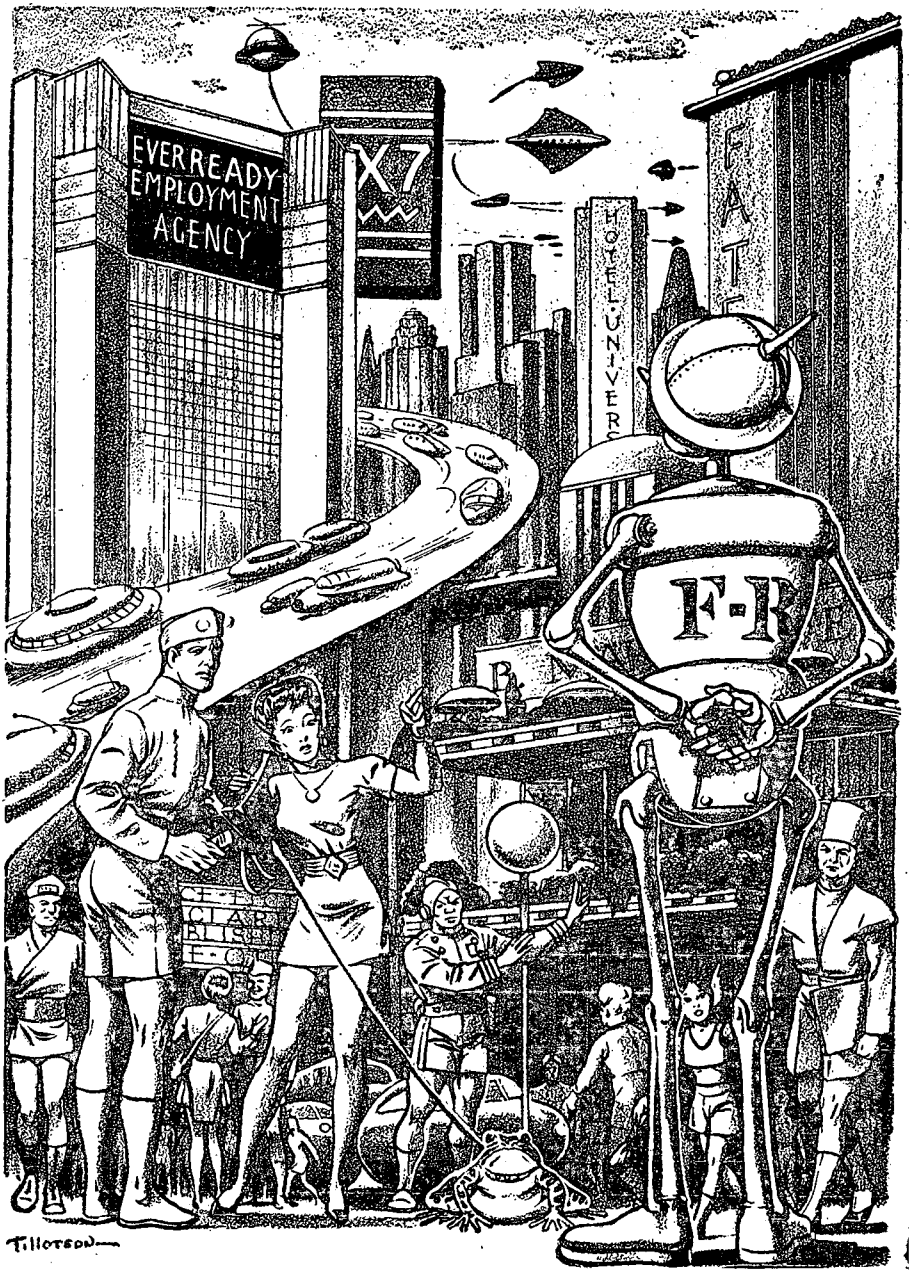

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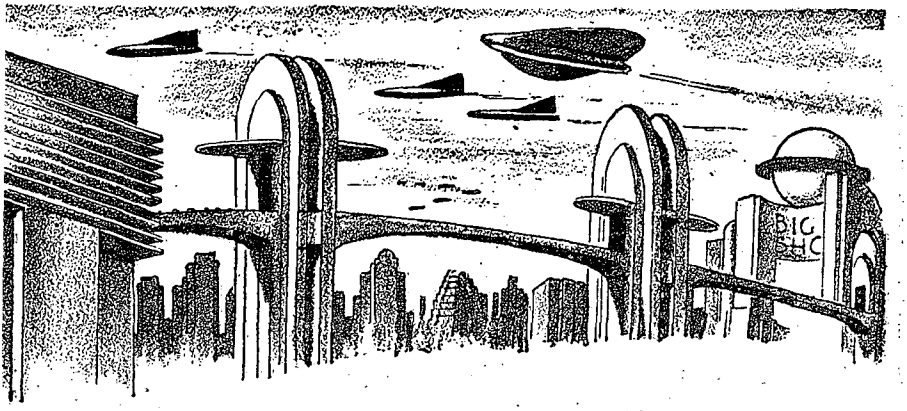

Illustration by Joe Tillotson

ROBOT UNWANTED

By Daniel Keyes

Robert was the only one on Earth — an F. R. That meant he was a free robot; free to do anything he wanted—but he didn't want to die!

"DID you see that?"

"Look he's standing on the man-walk!"

"What does that robot think he is . . . ?"

"It's F-R, you know, the one they freed . . ."

Standing on the raised man-walk on the south side of Agency Avenue, he looked like any of the other utility-robots that hurried up and down the robot-ramp behind him—performing their various services, occupied in their various jobs—except for the letters F-R stenciled in black on his silvery surface, and the fact that he was not moving along the low-set robot-ramp. He was looking up at a blinking sign that sparkled from the fifth story window of the tall building. It read — EVER-READY EMPLOYMENT AGENCY.

Robert F-R walked into the building. He looked neither to the right nor to the left as he walked, although he knew that the men were gaping at him. It always seem-

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ed to take people unawares. It shocked them to have him assert himself right in front of their eyes, even though every one of them knew of him, and was well aware of what the supreme court verdict had been six months ago. He had made the headlines for a very long time before that.

A man spit, and the saliva ran down his leg. He ignored it.

It was dificult to climb the stairs, With his secondary power-pile turned down—to conserve his rapidly dwindling energy source—his usual 100 pound carriage had increased to 750 pounds. His sensors responded with a dull aching throb. He'd not been lubricated since the end of the trial—six months ago—and every one of his joints now sent a grinding stimulus through his balanced force circuit, jammed static into his brain. He looked down and thought of the hole worn in his rubber foot-silencer pads. A human, he thought, would have considered that funny.

The sign on the door indicated the employment agency he sought. He turned the knob and walked in.

The large waiting room was filled with smoke. Men were standing around talking. A few men saw the F-R brand on his breastplate. They whispered to each other, and then slowly the noise subsided into a quiet that was seeped with anger and hate—emotions well whipped-up by the power of the press.

He walked slowly toward the receptionist at the far end of the hall, and the wall of men—unyielding at first—gave way grudgingly.

"Good afternoon. I'm Robert F-R, and I'm looking for a job."

The girl stared at him for a moment, swallowed, and nodding to the pile of applications on her right, said, "You . . . you'll have to fill out one of them."

He picked the yellow form off the desk and took it over to the writing table at the side of the room. As the girl ran into one of the inner offices, the room jumped alive with voices.

"Takin' men' jobs . . ."

"I knew something like this would happen . . ."

"That editorial in the TIMES was right . . ."

"Aw! Give the thing a break. He was freed legally."

"It's a dirty shame, with so many men out of work. I say . . ."

The girl had reappeared at the door. There was a man with her and she pointed toward him. Robert shut the voices out and wrote on the application:

NAME: Robert F(ree)-R(obot).

ADDRESS: None. AGE: 15 years.

PLACE OF BIRTH: Servo Manufacturing Co.. 185 Robot Road, N.Y.C.

EDUCATION: Original tapes through fourth year high school.

Employer added tapes in Philosophy, Sociology, Physics and Astronomy.

PREVIOUS EMPLOYER: John

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W. Ashburn (deceased). ADDRESS 100 Park Drive, N.Y.C. CAPACITY IN WHICH EMPLOYED: Personal servant and companion. REASON FOR LEAVING: Freed in accordance with provisions of deceased employer's will. Supreme Court decision 888364 B. April 28th 2153. POSITION APPLIED FOR: Any. SALARY DESIRED: Any.

He brought the application to the desk and returned to a spot near the wall to wait Yes, he had won his right to freedom, but it had taken five years of fighting in courts throughout the country. The country had been divided on the issue. Most were against him, some were mildly tolerant—no one favored his cause. Anti-Robot leagues had come into existance, and the newspapers had washed the nation in violent propaganda. Robert was eventually freed, but Congress immediately passed a law prohibiting any further robot-manumission. The will had originally provided for him to have a share in the Ashburn estate, but lawyers' fees had wiped that out. He was penniless. He needed money to maintain himself; there was lubrication, power-pile reactivation and gasketing to be taken care of. He needed a job badly.

HE would have preferred to stand during the interview since shifting his joints required more energy, but he took the proferred chair and waited for the man with the big red nose and the beetled brows to begin.

"Ah . . . ahem . . . ah, I'm Endicott. Wright Endicott. Now what can I do for you Mr. Ah . . ." he looked at the application, "Mr. F-R."

Robert answered in a low voice which showed the barest trace of uneven modulation. "I need a job —desperately."

"A job? Oh *a job*. Well we have nothing for you at the present time but we'll let you . . . *A Job?* What on earth do *you* need a job for?"

Robert lowered his jaw to communicate the mechanical equivalent of a smile. "I may be the only free-robot in existence, but I still have certain basic needs. Lubricant for instance, a power pile reactivation, and," he said bringing his foot up to indicate his silencer-padding, "I even need soles."

Mr. Endicott looked impressed. He stroked his chin, and pulled on his bulbous nose, and then said. "Hmmmmm. Quite a problem you've got there. Quite a problem." He thought a while and then said. "I read in the papers that you came into a fortune when the court decided in your favor. Why don't you live on that?"

Robert lifted and dropped his shoulders in the effect of a shrug. "The papers. They get everything but the facts. You see, the case took over five years. Lawyers' fees wiped out every cent there was left after taxes. I don't have anything."

The interviewer listened intently.

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"Oh," he said. "I see." He scratched his nose and pulled on his ear. "Well, you see," he began, "these are pretty hard times. There are thousands of men out of work. You saw that crowd outside. Even if we had a job, if we gave it to you they'd tear us apart. And who would hire you? No one would give you a job that a *man* could do." His brows furrowed. "And any job that a man can't handle can be done by a robot—not you, but a robot that someone owns. Who would pay you to do something that a servo can do?"

"I see," said Robert, getting to his feet. "I guess it's hopeless. Thank you for interviewing me. Would it be any use for me to try any of the other agencies?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "What can they do for you? We're the largest in the city—"

"Yes, I see."

He left the office, made his way through the jeering crowd, and went out to the street, but this time he went out the service entrance that led directly onto the robot-ramp.

HE walked slowly to conserve his energy. Accasionally a robot—hurrying on some errand, and noticing the initials blazoned on his back—would turn to look at him. One robot even gave him a friendly wave. He waved back. Robots also read the papers he thought, but they're not stirred-up by emotionally charged slogans like *Machines Theaten Mankind,* and *Robots Want To Rule*. He thought of the Anti-Robot League that had sprung up overnight when the news was released that his case was going to the Supreme Court. What had the fools hoped to accomplish by destroying their robots and urging everyone to do the same? There were times when he felt . . .

Robert hesitated at another employment agency sign. ACME EMPLOYMENT. What was the use? It would be the same. He walked over to the man-walk that rose two feet above the level of the robot-ramp. Someone who had been too lazy to walk ten feet to the incinerator chute had dropped a TIMES on the ground. It was the first one he had seen in two days, and there was always a possibility in the *Help-Wanted* columns. Robert got to the paper two seconds before a fat unshaven man, and he scooped it up.

"Hey! Give me that!"

"I'm sorry, but I got it first."

"What?"

But Robert wasn't listening. He had the paper under his arm, and he was walking away. The man stood there with his fat fleshy hands on his hips, and his mouth open.

But who would give a robot a job that a man or a servo could do?

ROBERT F-R walked into the Robot Repair Center, and waited in the small softly-lit anteroom. He looked at the headlines

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—in the newspaper—that spoke of unemployment, and he made a mental note of the president's promise of good times in the very near future. He was about to turn to the *Help-Wanted* section when a woman came out of the inner office followed by a nodding, bowing attendant.

"Yes, madam. Of course madam. You'll have 'Rollo' in plenty of time for your Saturday night party. Yes, yes he'll be in perfect serving order, and I'll make sure to put in that extra holder for high-ball glasses and ice-cubes."

The woman breezed past Robert and the man came over to him. "Oh, no! Not you again? Look, I've told you a dozen times. *No Credit!*"

Robert got to his feet, clanking a bit unsteadily. "Mr. Brandon, please —I need a lubricating job and a reactivation. I—I'll work for you for a week. Make pick-ups and deliveries, and I'll even keep the place clean."

The man turned away and waved his hand in disguest. "I told you a million times that I've got half-a-dozen of my own Servo's to do that work for me. I even got two of 'em inside doing nothing for four days —and I'll probably have to sell them. Look kid, things are bad, business is slow, and Servo-Lube and Pile-Reactivation cost money. So go away and stop bothering me. Huh!"

He walked into the inner office and clicked the door shut in Robert's face.

ROBERT moved down the ramp now more slowly than before. The grinding of his parts sent grating impulses through his body. The feeble energy generated by his weak secondary-pile slowed his reaction-time down to half. His visual senors, by retaining negative after-images longer caused him occasionally to see double, and his vision was constantly blurred. He had, at most, twenty-four hours before the power to his brain stopped.

What did a robot do under circumstances like these? Who would —if he were unbiased—blame him for committing robbery? It wouldn't be hard to break into a store or an apartment . . . He stopped. He shook violently as a flash of radiation shot up into his brain with a force that nearly tore off the top of his head. The safety valve of the Robotic Law tape, had been triggered by his thoughts.

What was he thinking of? Had he become so depraved as to sink to the level which man himself considered and had set as immoral? Surely he could face destruction with better reactions than that. Yet . . .

Robert struck the side of his head with a clenched metal fist. Fool! Another thought like that and he'd discharge his secondary-pile in self-punishment. There had to be a way out! There had to be something he could do, which was impossible for a man to do, and for which it was impractical to use a servo-robot.

Robert looked up from his think-

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ing and found that he had taken the ramp which had lead him to the loading-docks of the East River. He stood there—watching the robodores unloading cargo from a ship—then he walked over to a piling, and leaned against it as he watched the water lapping against the pier.

He avoided any definite thought of suicide. That would only result in another punishment shock. But there was a definite feeling in the air. This was the way-out of hopeless situations that humans often took. He enjoyed the irony of the situation, and wondered what would happen if a robot—any robot—should *accidently* fall off a pier.

It would be a slow destruction—perhaps faster if the robot in question were, like himself, poorly lubricated—and in a matter of hours water would penetrate the superfine lube oil that filled his joints. Slowly every ball-and-socket joint and very swivel would freeze up, and he would become immobile. Any point at which the fine lube-oil was washed-away, providing an opening for water to seep in, there would be a quick splutter and flash, and it would be all over. There would be no irate owner to haul him off to the mechanic for a cleaning and repile job. No man would know that he—as a free robot in this society—had failed.

Robert shifted his thoughts quickly as he felt dangerously close to the Law's safety-threshold. He had about twenty-four hours. There would be plenty of time for accidents to happen.

He turned away from the water and walked down to the loading dock where the robodores were unloading the huge cargo-ship. The heavy-duty robots marched back and forth carrying cases of raw materials that had come from across the seas. The country's depleted national resources—especially in the essential ores—had resulted in increased shipping.

Once there had been the hope that space-travel would be developed, and that raw materials which all of the earth needed so badly, would be replaced from other worlds. But there was no space-travel. Beyond the firing of several unmanned rockets to the moon, and the launching of one manned ship that never came back, there had been no attempts to reach out through space. Men refused to take those risks even when the wealth of worlds was there for the taking. What good was wealth, men said, when the psychophysicists computed the statistical probability of a man's returning to earth at one-in-a-thousand? That was for men, Robert had long ago decided, but given a chance, robots could do it.

Robert noticed a dismantled robot lying near the entrance to the cargo shack. An accident? Perhaps they could use an extra hand. He walked slowly toward the foreman's office. Through the small oval window he could see the foreman occupied with

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some papers on his desk, his head hidden in a cloud of cigar smoke.

"Ahem! I beg your pardon, sir . . ."

"Yeah?"

"I just noticed that one of your robots was incapacitated. I was wondering if you could use an extra hand."

The man screwed his cigar over to the other side of his mouth, and looked at Robert suspiciously. "Who do you belong to? Who sent you?"

"No one," said Robert. He pointed to the initials on his chest. "I'm F-R . . . You've heard of me. The free-robot."

The man's expression turned to contempt. "Yeah. I heard of you. *The free-robot—hah!*" He turned his attention back to the papers on his desk. "Nah! I got no work for you."

"Please!" said Robert. "Look, it will be worth your while. I'll work for less than it costs you to rent and maintain those other robots. You could pocket the difference for yourself. All I want for eight hours work is a lube-job and a low pile-activation." He waited creakingly for the man to decide.

"How do I know you won't take the lube and charge and then refuse to work? You're free. I couldn't force you.

Robert thought a second. "Give me the lube now so that I can operate. You can give me the activation after I finish the job."

"Okay," said the foreman, after a moment's hesitation. "Help yourself to the grease can over behind the office. Servo twenty-six is in charge. He'll tell you what to do."

"Thank you. Thank you very much sir. I—I'll give you a real good day's work. You won't be sorry that you gave me a chance. You have no idea what this means to me . . ."

"Yeah. Okay! Okay! Get to work, I'm busy."

The grease was far heavier than anything he had ever used before, and it would probably have some eventual ill effects, but it would last a lot longer than the super-lube, and it would be better protection against the elements. It felt good to be able to move his joints freely again. With the grinding stopped, even his vision returned to normal. If he got anything of a decent reactivation he'd be good for at least six months. Robert congratulated himself on his good fortune, and walked out onto the loading dock.

He turned his secondary power-pile up for lightness and faster speed. He calculated that at the increased rate it would be good for fifteen hours instead of twenty-two, but then he'd get the new charge in eight hours, and he couldn't risk the displeasure of the foreman by moving too slowly. He'd work like he'd never worked before.

EIGHT hours later Robert felt the feeble uneven spurts of energy emanating from his power source. It made him stumble every so often, and he had to stop to keep

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from blanking out. But soon he would be recharged and then he would be on top of the world. True it would not solve his basic problem, of finding something to do to sustain himself permanently, but it would give him that vital necessity —time.

He walked into the foreman's office, wiping off some of the excess grease that had run down his arms and legs, and he carefully plastered it back into his joints.

"Well sir, I'm finished!" he said exuberantly.

"The man looked up with a scowl. "Huh! So what?"

"Well," said Robert- softly, "I thought you might care to give me my charge now. You know, as we agreed."

"Activator's out of order," the man snapped, turning back to his work. "I just checked it."

"But you—"

"But nothing. Take some more grease if you want it, but get the hell out of here. I got no use for a *free robot* anyway. Now git!"

Robert's frame was shaking with a reaction as close to rage as it was possible for him to have. He started to reach out for the foreman's neck. He would strange . . . he would crush . . . he would kill . . . The blinding flash that sizzled up from his power-pile to his brain made him writhe under the pressure of the sensation. He froze and then fell back muttering. *"You animal . . . you dirty rotten animal . . ."* His arms fell limply to his side, and then as he realized the hopelessness of the situation he turned and walked out of the office.

HE stumbled down the robot-ramp that led from the deck off the pier where he had stood before. This then was man. He had forgotten that man was an animal who had no Laws or morals and ethics *built* into him. He had forgotten that man could lie, and steal and cheat—and look straight into your eyes. And man had the nerve to build robots that could think and feel, and make them ethical and subservient.

Now there was little hope. He had seven hours left, and after that he would be dead. If he died there on the docks someone would salvage him and claim him for a workhorse, and there would be no freedom after that.

He looked around him and studied the lapping swells of the darkish waters, and the muddy-blue sky. It was late and now the stars were visible. If space-travel had only been conquered . . . Those systems and galaxies would be accessible to robots. Out there a free-robot could find a place for the image of dignity in which man had created him. "Why?" Why? He shook his fist at the stars. "Why is there no solution to my problem?"

He sank back hopelessly against the piling, and watched a little stub-tailed black dog digging into a pile of garbage that had been thrown

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on one end of the pier. Lucky animal, he thought. If only his problem could have been solved as easily.

He turned and looked at the dark waters. Now, if an accident should occur, the heavy grease lining his joints would prevent seepage for hours. It would take a long time to die, and there would be much punishment.

This would be the end, the end of the world's ghastliest joke—a free robot. A tale to be told to children with laughter and scorn. A story for the newspapers with the we-told-you-so headlines. To be sucked into the muck and mud at the bottom of the East River, and remain there through centuries among the fishes and the slime and the garbage accumulated for decades . . .

Robert stopped. He jumped to his feet, and his arms and legs trembled with excitement. *Garbage . . . The dog . . .* That was it! The solution to his problem! SALVAGE . . ."

He ran through the factors quickly. At the bottom of the river, among the slime and ooze there was garbage, and certainly in that garbage there would be things of value. Not perhaps of sufficient value to be worth the time and trouble of men, and certainly not worth risking robots for, but *he*—he could go down into the river to hunt for something worth money.

The coating of heavy grease would last him—he was thankful for that now—it would last at least as long as his weakening power. If he found something of value, something that was easily transactable, he might be able to afford an overhauling.

He was walking up and back now, every thought clicking into place. If he succeeded he could do it steadily, on a full-time basis; if he failed, well, he'd keep going until there was not enough power to bring back to the surface. His pile would be dead—not through suicide, but through failure.

It was a race against time, and he moved quickly. He smeared the grease evenly through all his joints and swivels, taking from areas where he had an excess and adding to areas in which there was not enough. He walked down the side of the pier and found a coil of hawse-chain hanging on a hook by the boathouse. This he would borrow. He picked up a heavy rock and made it fast to one end of the chain, the other end he clamped to the piling. He threw the rock into the water. That was so that he could climb to the dock again if he found anything. The descent was to be faster. He was ready. He took one last look at the stars, and walked off the pier into a resounding splash of water.

HE sank quickly, the water swirling over his head in little whirlpools. It was dark and he could see nothing, but he would not turn up his eye-torch until he was actually ready to search. He felt his descent

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slow down as he sank deep over his head in black loose mud. Time clicked off in his mind. He had six hours to go, so it would be best to operate close to the pier. It would take less time to get back, and he was more likely to find objects dropped accidentally from the dock.

A fish slapped his face and scurried away. He moved slowly propelling himself through the mud by making backwater with his hands. He touched something, but didn't bother to turn on his light. He recognized by its feel that it was an ancient *anchor* used by ships centuries ago. He moved forward and the mud began to thin out, enabling him to see a bit. The bottom was littered with refuse of all kinds, the great predominance being old rusted cans, from an era before men used synthetic foods exclusively. He moved on.

Cans, steel girders and human bones, everything, but nothing that was worth money. He pushed and clawed his way through the debris. He had to find something of value, but three hours passed in vain. It was no use. He was through.

As he stopped he felt his feet sink deeper into the mud. He tried to lift his left leg. *It was stuck.* He tugged on his right leg and it came loose. He had to get his other foot free! He had to spend every second of the remaining three hours, in searching. He couldn't just stay there and wait for the end. He pulled and pulled, twisting himself as he did. He threw himself forward onto his face, and he felt the leg come free, but with it he had felt a peculiar crunching sound. When he tried to stand, he found that the ball-and-socket joint of his left knee was broken. He sank to his knees and began to crawl. He would spend every second of the time that he could move in searching the bottom of this river. There would be something.

An hour later he saw it. It was the metal frame of what appeared to have been a sea going craft of some kind. It was twenty feet long from front to back, and all that was left was the steelwork—the keel and gaunt skeleton-like ribs. Robert crawled toward it as quickly as he could. Perhaps there had been people on board when this thing had come to the bottom, and maybe they had carried with them something of value. An hour and a half left. There had to be something. Some little, valuable thing.

After more than an hour's fruitless search, he lay there on the river bottom near the stern of the boat, deciding on whether to spend more time there or move on. As he moved his leg he felt it scrape against something, and he picked up what appeared to be a small sack of brown metal-mesh. It was sealed all around —solidly mesh on three sides, while the third had a double metal bar across the top fastened by some sort of twist-lock. He fumbled with it, and in his haste, nearly spilled the

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contents when it opened. As his light scanned the bag and its contents, it occured to him that this was a woman's purse, used hundreds of years ago by the female sex. The fact that it was made of metal mesh puzzled him, but he turned his attention to the contents.

A diamond brooch, a pair of pendant earrings to match, and a fistfull of strange old coins. These last Robert knew would bring him more from coin collectors than the diamonds. He hesitated no longer, but snapped the bag shut, and started dragging himself toward the direction of the pier. He had less than fifteen minutes worth of power left in his secondary-pile.

HIS thoughts were mixed and confused as he crawled along the ramp that led from the pier to the city. He kept moving as he searched for a gyro-taxi. It took about five minutes before he sighted one.

"Taxi! Taxi!"

The gyro swooped around at the call and hovered a foot off the ground. "You call for a taxi?"

Robert pulled himself up by the handle of the door, and started to get in.

"Waydaminit! Servos can't ride taxis!" the man shouted.

"I can," whispered Robert in a barely audible voice. He settled in the seat, opened the purse and withdrew one diamond earring. "Will this be enough payment for you to get me to the Robot Repair Shop in a hurry?"

The cabbie's eyes grew wide. "Is it a real diamond?"

The question made Robert stop short. He hadn't thought of the possibility of fake jewelry, but as far as he knew it was real. He said. "You can have it analyzed for yourself and see."

The cabbie turned, with a shrug of the shoulders and placed his hand on the starter. In two minutes they were at the repair center.

"Help me inside," said Robert. "I've got a broken leg."

The cab driver frowned, but he got out and helped Robert into the plush-carpeted waiting room. As he settled down in the chair the driver left. Robert pushed the button to summon the attendant.

"What? You again? Haven't I told you to stop annoying me? I'll call the police right now."

"Wait a minute," whispered Robert. "I thought you said business was bad. How can you afford to turn away a customer?"

"Why you smart-alecky . . ."

"Wait! . . ." Robert removed the other diamond earring from the bag. I believe this diamond will be enough to pay for a complete overhaul job—reactivation, fix my broken joint, and a general cleanup."

The man's jaw dropped for a moment, and then he said—in a quiet obesiant voice. "Why yes, I think so." He took the diamond from Robert's outstretched hand, and examin-

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ed it.

"How do I know it's not stolen," he said with a frown.

"You can check with the police later," answered Robert.

The man started to the phone.

"You can do that later," insisted Robert. "I'm in a hurry, give me the recharge first."

"Yes sir. Right this way to the repair shop," bowed the attendant.

"I can't walk. Joint's broken."

"Oh!" exclaimed the attendant. He called two servos in to help carry Robert. They carried him through the office into the repair shop, and set him into a huge plasti-metal chair.

As the man assembled the apparatus, Robert thought a moment and said, "Are these two utility-robots for sale?"

"Yes, but . . ."

Robert took out the diamond brooch and flashed it in the man's face. "Do you think this would be sufficient payment for those robots?"

The man looked startled. He took the brooch, and examined it. "Of . . . of course, but you know the law against setting any more robots free. I . . ."

"Free, nothing," snapped Robert. "You're selling them to me. I can own property and I need them for my business."

"Oh," said the man. "Well in that case, I guess it's all right."

Robert leaned back in the chair, and the time clicked off in his brain. In two minutes he would have been completely dead. He watched the man push the two cylindrical pile-shells into place, one on each side of the chair. He leaned back expectantly. As the attendant moved to turn the switch he asked Robert:

"May I inquire what business you're in?"

The sensation of the current re-activating through his metal body, gave Robert a warm, tingling reaction. He settled back easily, his arms and legs hanging pleasantly loose.

"What business am I in?" murmured Robert half aloud. "Salvage . . ." he answered. "Salvage . . ."

And—he thought to himself—*with the money from that, I'll use my knowledge to build better and cheaper robots, and with the money from that that I'll build rocket-ships to be manned by robots and maybe someday there'll be a place for free robots—a place in the stars . . .*

THE END

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LONDON BECOMES SPACE CONSCIOUS

By John Carnell

How did London take to the new science-fiction movies? The well-known British science fiction editor gives the lowdown.

NOT since the reality of the V-2 have Londoners been so space conscious as they are now, but this time, in the false dawn of extra terrestrial flight, it is a pleasure to see the rockets and spaceships—even if they are mainly on the billboards and hoardings.

You can catch a glimpse of them in the Strand, or across from Eros in Piccadilly Circus, blasting a course for the Moon—or close by Marble Arch, with the great sweep of Hyde Park stretching away south and west, you might catch a glimpse of one expedition that aimed for the Moon and hit Mars by mistake.

You can see them down in the subway, hobnobbing with streamlined jets, for, by coincidence, the posters of Britain's annual air pageant depict streamlined rocket designs.

But particularly, you can see them in Leicester Square where "Destination Moon" opened recently. That is, if the crowds outside the Leicester Square Theatre will part long enough for you to look at the bills.

This consciousness of higher things all started some months ago, when Arthur C. Clarke (author, and chief astronaut of the BIS), gave John Public a righthanded jolt with a TV presentation of the illustrations from the Ley/Bonestell book *Conquest Of Space,* which was admirably and seriously done, and aroused minute but just praise from the armchair newspaper critics. Shortly afterward, the publication of his book *Interplanetary Flight* brought spaceflight further into the limelight, and for once no critic reared his ugly head and said: "But *what* does a rocket push against?"

Without pausing for breath, Clarke followed that thrust with yet another TV program, this time depicting spaceships through the ages. For this he showed a whole range of illustrations, drawing many of them from the promags to show the highly original (and sometimes completely non-functional) ideas portrayed by science-fiction artists, closing with his now-famous Clarke-

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designed dumb-bell shaped ship. During the course of this program Arthur gave a very strong plug for a "forthcoming technically perfect Hollywood film" dealing with space-flight to the Moon.

But, whether by accident or design, a week later space opera came to town in the shape of "Rocketship X-M" which brought a howl of caustic criticism from the jaded film critics, but, nevertheless, aroused sufficient interest to induce the public to stand in line to see it.

Two weeks after X-M had snatched the advance publicity, the trade preview of "Destination Moon" got the critics overhauling their typewriters and ignoring their stale beer —two in a row was too good to miss.

Authors Clarke, Temple, Chandler, editor Gillings and myself, BIS technicians, BBC drama producers, and a few of Joe Fann's relatives, made up a cosmic (and doubtless comical), group to see the trade show. You know what these shows can be like—a subdued undertone of conversation against a background of flaring matches and curling smoke, 95% of the audience in the last stages of TB or afflicted with asthma, bronchitis, or smoker's cough, and a continual drift to the nearest bar, or the men's room, or both.

DM wasn't a bit like that after the first five minutes. In fact, within fifteen minutes everyone began to appreciate Heinlein, Bonestell, Hollywood, two years and a lot of dollars (not forgetting our old Pal, George). During the take-off scene the tension amongst the hard-bitten audience could be felt physically. Thereafter they gave their undivided attention to the trip. That is, until the bomb fell . . .

In this case, the bomb was a 23-word piece of dialogue accompanying the planting of a flag on the Moon. "By the grace of God and in the name of the USA . . . " here Warner Anderson paused momentarily, and if you had brushed up on your dianetics you could mind-read half a thousand people thinking 'Oh, God, not *this!*' . . . "I take possession of this planet for the benefit of mankind."

The last few words of the sentence didn't mean a thing. Despite Marshall Aid, Bundles For Britain, Food Parcels, and the Korean war, every film critic in London fastened upon that one piece of bad dramatization, played it up, and played the real worth of the film down.

"A Flag Goes Up On The Moon," headed the *Daily Express,* but critic James Leasor admitted liking the space rescue scene. While the *Evening Standard* critic (a woman), stated "It seems the United States is hysterically worried about the moon as a probable projectile base in the next war. Up go some braves in a super-duper gadgety rocket, and landing on that pock-marked old derelict, proclaim that by the grace of God the moon is now a part of the United States Empire." Not

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exactly according to the script (this is called author's license, I believe!), but she was probably the person sitting behind me with the thick lensed glasses and the hearing aid.

The *Daily Worker,* organ of the Communist Party, managed to embellish the facts in their usual subtle manner, quoting ". . . . five good Americans and true go in a rocket to the moon . . ." I only saw four members in the ship, but I didn't have red filters on my glasses. (The fifth crew member was probably a Party Member in an invisible suit). "Why," continued their film reporter. "They have seen the great truth that the Moon may become an aggressor State (because) the first nation able to use it for sending missiles will control the world." And he didn't miss the standard bearer either.

The Star quoted it as "a luxury cruise in Technicolor—another celluloid jaunt through space," but admitted that "the film skillfully avoids most of the pitfalls of Hollywood-style scientific adventure." The *Daily Mail* gave it a straight write-up, but ended with "as a boys' magazine thriller it is fine."

Best, and longest, review came from the *Observer,* but even their critic couldn't resist a pass at the declaration of the Moon's independence.

Having given a lot of thought to that particular sequence, I am still wondering how a British producer would have phrased it. And the more I think about it the more I think there was a lot of green in the eyes of the critics.

I have always thought that mankind in the mass is literally swayed by the song-and-dance antics of the newspaper columnists, yet, despite these facetious and sometimes adverse criticisms of what we know to be the finest film of its time, Londoners have been flocking to see it. Even on the wet evenings (practically every night), long queues have formed around the theatre.

Meanwhile, at London airport, two spacesuits shipped from Hollywood to grace the foyer of the Leicester Square Theatre, languish in their crate, detained by the Customs authorities. Nobody can find any regulations governing the import of spacesuits—and, as Parliament is in recession, nobody can pass a law about them and make them taxable.

This doesn't end the era of space consciousness, however. Coming in the future is the British edition of *Conquest Of Space,* and advance publicity is already being tied in with the color movie, which, by then, will be travelling the outer circuits. And there will be another Clarke TV program on rockets, plus a radio feature on DM.

After all these years of knocking on doors and standing cap in hand the rocket boys seem to be enjoying themselves.

Londoners seem to be sharing their enjoyment, too.

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FACTOR UNKNOWN

By Sam Merwin Jr.

Houghton went back into Time to try to change history; but all he did was make the future worse—in potential! Then Fate took a hand . . .

DWIGHT Houghton—or rather the intricate bank of "thinking" machines that lined the control cabin in his strange vessel—had calculated correctly. Where space was concerned at any rate. The view on the panoramic 'visor screen above the instrument panels told him that. In the matter of time he could only discover the answer through contact outside.

His lips compressed, he put a forefinger against the release button, causing heavy steel lever-locks—much like the mechanical guardians of a modern bank vault—to slide back. He pushed open the oval port and stepped down into soft green turf. He was in a little clearing amid the well-tailored forest grove at the rear of the huge estate.

Through gaps in the tall pines he sighted the five-foot wall of English box that marked the boundary of clipped lawns and lush flower beds beyond the trees. Above the hedge he caught a glimpse of the half-timbered gables and brick chimneys of the great house.

Save that the world was in full fresh leaf the scene looked exactly as it had when he surveyed his arrival spot for the last time some seventeen hours earlier. Then of course it had been March-gaunt and windswept with here and there a patch of half-spent snow.

He walked slowly through the trees toward a gap in the hedge, feeling the weight of his problem. More or less unconsciously he brushed an orange-and-black ladybug from one bare well-sinewed forearm as he passed through the hedge-gap into the gardens beyond.

Houghton knew where he was—but not when. And he was not a man who enjoyed uncertainty. Although the cybernetic machinery in the vessel behind him was supposedly foolproof, he could not help wondering what time it was—what day, what month, what year.

Then, when he attained the lip of the two-hundred-yard expanse of well-barbered turf that led gently upward to the house itself, he saw the girl and stopped. The tension within him eased—for sight of her provided reassurance that the in-

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"Miss 1901," he said, "step into 1952!"

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credibly complex machinery of his vessel had not failed.

In black straw sailor, starched white blouse with leg-o-mutton sleeves and long fawn tubular skirt, she was the living embodiment of the Gibson girl. She reminded Houghton of all the drawing he had seen when, as a boy, he had rainy-day rummaged through the bound volumes of old magazines in the library of the great pile of stone, wood and stucco that lay at the head of the lawn.

She was bent slightly forward—a strand of her high-piled copper hair caressing her near cheek, a croquet mallet gripped in her right hand. One high-buttoned shoe reposed daintily but firmly upon a green-striped wooden ball — via which she was about to bash a purple-striped ball to the lawn's far reaches. Regarding him, her mouth was ajar, revealing even white teeth, and her smoky blue eyes were agape with astonishment.

"Hello," he said casually, walking over to her and drawing cigarette case and lighter from the breast pocket of his shirt as he did so. "Could you tell me what day this is?"

"Friday," she replied faintly, apparently half-hypnotized.

"Sorry—I mean the date, not the day of the week."

"Why—it's June fifteenth," she said slowly, still stunned.

"And the year?" he added. "No I'm neither crazy nor drunk and it *is* important—to me at any rate. What year is it?"

"Nineteen-one," she said. Then she straightened, took a deep breath and began to exhibit an outraged glow. Her smoky blue eyes flashed sudden fire. She said, "Will you please state your business here—before I have you thrown off the grounds?"

"Oh!" He followed her gaze and realized that, for nineteen one, his garb was definitely not *au fait*. He was wearing well-scuffed loafers, rumpled light-blue gabardine slacks and a sports shirt featuring yellow dolphins cavorting on a dark-brown sea. The problem of clothing anachronisms was one he had forgotten utterly.

Otherwise Houghton was fairly well fixed. He had managed to obtain a couple of thousand dollars in nineteenth century gold coin against emergencies. His vessel held a hundred cartons of cigarettes, complete sets of almanacs and histories of the first half of the twentieth century, lockers full of canned and frozen food. But clothes—as usual he had failed to consider them. He frowned faintly in self-annoyance.

Sensing that the girl was about to shout for help he said hastily, "Don't yell—I belong here—in a way." She hesitated and looked with disapproval on his cigarette case. Hastily he returned it to his pocket and brought out his wallet.

"You may not believe me but

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it's true enough." He made it as casual, as matter-of-fact as he could. "I have proof back there in the trees. At any rate look this over before you set the lurchers on me."

With an expression which said silently but definitely that she could not understand why she was bothering, the girl accepted his wallet and stared at its contents. Her careful diffidence became bewilderment, then wonder, then a very fair facsimile of red-headed rage.

"If this is some sort of a joke—" she began but he cut her off incisively.

"It very definitely isn't," he replied. "I have come back fifty years in time to talk to my great uncle Enoch Dwight. My vessel—ship if you will—is back there in the clearing." He paused, took the offensive with, "May I ask who *you* are? You very definitely aren't my mother."

"*If* you please!" she said, the tilt of her freckle-dusted nose becoming more pronounced. She handed back his wallet, then took up the crocquet mallet and sent its purple-striped victim careening rapidly across the lawn into the bed of azaleas that lined the far hedge. Still holding the mallet she straightened again, regarded him coldly.

"Furthermore," she stated, "I haven't the slightest intention of walking with you alone through the woods—or anywhere else for that matter. You might be a kidnapper —or worse."

"Matter of opinion," said Dwight Houghton easily. If he knew nothing else he knew women. At thirty he had been sole beneficiary of the income from the incredible Enoch Dwight empire for nine years. And even before that his wealth and reasonable good looks had made him one of the world's prime male targets.

He studied the girl openly—knowing he had her hooked. He said, "You must be my cousin Alison—once removed. You look a little like your father, a little like my mother's earlier pictures. Have a cigarette? These are nineteen-fifty-one models."

"Thank you, I don't . . ." she began with an even sharper tilt to her nose. But her voice faded out and there was longing in the smoky blue eyes as he opened his case. All at once her hauteur dissolved and she said, "We'd better get out of sight of the house. My father . . ."

"YOUR father," he said as they strolled through the gap in the hedge, "has not come down to us as exactly a broad-minded character—where other people's conduct is concerned."

They halted and Houghton lit cigarettes. The girl accepted hers, inhaled gratefully and shook her head slowly. "I still don't believe it. You come out of nowhere, looking like a fantastic scarecrow, and calmly tell me you're my niece's son—and, mind you, she has yet to

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marry."

"She won't for two years," he told her quietly. "Not until more than a year after the death of your father and your disappearance from the face of the earth."

"My *what?*" she gasped, nearly choking on cigarette smoke. Casually he was walking her into the trees, toward the clearing.

"Your disappearance," he told her. "In case you aren't aware of the fact you vanished from human ken one day—December eleventh of this year to be exact—and were never seen again. The chronology, of course, is that of *my* time."

"I think you're crazy," she said slowly. She laughed shakily.

"Not as crazy as you are to walk through these woods with a total stranger," Houghton replied. Then, "*Now* do you believe me?"

They had come to the clearing—the vessel was before them, its bright steel-alloy surface pitted and blackened by its journey through polydimensional sub-space to span the helical swirl of time.

Houghton walked to it, punched in peculiar sequence a small button that lay flush with the hull. The oval port swung open and the trim complex interior lay revealed. He looked around at the girl, who stood at his shoulder, her eyes again wide with surprise.

"Your horseless-carriage world never saw anything like this," he informed her. He stood aside for her to enter. "Miss 1901," he said, "step into 1952!"

She flashed him a hesitant glance, then compressed her normally full lips, dropped her cigarette to the grass and ground it out under a dainty heel. Then, with a defiant swirl of her skirt and revelation of a shapely silken ankle, she entered the vessel.

Houghton put out his own cigarette and came in after her. "June fifteenth," he murmured half to himself. "Let's see, they'll be running the Belmont Stakes tomorrow." He looked at her sharply. "Ever take a little flyer on the ponies, Cousin Alison?"

"*Mis*ter Houghton—if that *is* your name—I don't know where you get your ideas of my character but . . ." Her voice trailed off again under his steady regard and a slow pink blush caused her freckles to fade out.

"Well," he told her with a grin, "you didn't stick around long enough to leave much comment in that department." He bowed her through the oval opening that divided the control cabin from the tiny lounge-library of the vessel, then walked to a bookshelf and ran a finger along the row of almanacs in front of him.

Without turning he said, "But you were written down as a very good-looking if somewhat mule-headed young lady—with a very low boiling point and a somewhat overstrong insistence that women can do everything men can do and with

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compound interest."

"And is anything wrong with that?" she snapped.

"Not a thing in the world," Houghton told her. He plucked one of the almanacs from the shelf, turned to face her. He noted that her color had deepened until it looked unsafe to touch. He added, "Where—or rather when—I come from the girls vote and run businesses and have most of the inherited money. Outside of biological differences—"

"*Please,* Mr. Houghton!" Her blush continued to burn brightly and, aware of it, she said angrily, "The almanac if you don't mind."

"Not at all," he replied and handed it to her with the page open to Belmont Stakes winners. She studied it, frowned, then said, "But this is absurd. Commando hasn't a chance!"

"Better put something down on him all the same—the records don't lie. Now, Cousin Alison, how about arranging for me to have a chat with your father? After all, I didn't make this journey for kicks."

"Why did you make it?" she asked with blunt curiosity.

"To save the world—I hope," he replied with utter seriousness.

"Your're joking," she said—but her attention was focused on the utterly alien surrounding in which they stood rather than on what Houghton said. It took a moment to sink in.

She closed the almanac and handed it back, said, "But Daddy is only a businessman. How do you expect a mere businessman to save the world fifty years from now—always granting your crazy story is true, which I don't for a moment admit?"

"It's true enough—and you know it. You can't help it."

She returned his gaze, then looked around her, smoky blue eyes dark with realization and growing fright. "I'm afraid I *do* believe you," she said reluctantly. "I don't want to—it scares me. But I—yes, I have to believe."

"Then how about my getting to your father?" he asked.

She sank onto one of the foam-covered mats that covered the wall-settees. There were two of them in the lounge, slightly curved to fit against the wall, one along a part of each side. They could also do duty as bunks if need be.

She said, "Suppose you tell me just how Daddy can help to save the world in your time?"

He sighed his relief, waved a lean hand toward the rows of massive history books in the shelves behind her. "It's all in there, Alison—but I'm afraid you'll have to dig out the details by yourself. I haven't time to tell you all of it." He paused and laughed shortly, without mirth, added, "Even if I could.

"Perhaps *time* is not the right word. With this vessel of mine, I seem to have all of past time at my disposal." He paused again, ran

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long fingers through his closely-cropped black hair.

"Take my word for it, Alison, the world I come from is rocketing toward self-destruction. The so-called first World War—America gets into it in nineteen seventeen—started the trouble and a second World War just about finished things off. The weapons of destruction available to the military and the politicians who give them their orders are capable of killing every living thing on earth—if not of destroying the planet itself."

"It sounds incredible—and horrible," Alison murmured. Then, "But I still don't see how a man like my father can alter such a course. After all, he's a mere—"

"Businessman," Houghton finished for her. "Listen, Alison—beginning right about now he is going to embark on the most remarkably successful series of investments known to finance. If I weren't heir to the fortune he piled up—or will pile up—I'd know nothing about it. He kept—I mean he will keep—his methods shrewdly hidden from the eyes of the future.

"But *I* know them. He will put money behind a young Detroit automobile maker named Henry Ford. He will enable a pair of devout young Ohioans, named Wilbur and Orville Wright to complete certain experiments with powered aircraft they are conducting or will shortly conduct on a North Carolina beach.

"He already has money in the steel trust and with the telephone and telegraph corporations. He will vastly increase these holdings. And with this increase he will lay the groundwork for international cooperation with certain monopolistic firms in England, in France and in Germany. Every one of them is going to pay off."

"Which still doesn't tell me how these activities of his will destroy the world," said Alison Dwight. "After all it's perfectly legitimate to seek a profit providing one has the means to do so."

"But, Alison, in the process your father will be assembling much more than mere profit," Houghton told her patiently. "He will be gathering power in unheard-of amounts for an individual in private life. And this power is going to be consistently misused by the very components of the corporate system he is going to set up before he dies."

"Why don't you, as heir to this great fortune, *do* something about it then?" the girl inquired with a hint of scorn.

Houghton kicked at a bench-mooring. "Dammit, why do you think I had this time-vessel built?" he countered angrily. "Why do you think I took the risk of coming back here? Your father rigged—will rig—his corporations so that I haven't the power to alter a thing where it counts. *That's* why I'm here. I've come back in time in the hope of straightening things out at the be-

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ginning."

"You want to change Daddy's point of view?" the girl suggested and there was a suggestion of mockery in her tone. She rose, moved toward the oval port of the vessel. "Very well, Dwight Houghton, come along with me. But I warn you—you'll find altering the rock of Gibraltar a far easier task."

* * *

TWO hours later—shortly before noon—Houghton leaned back as far as possible in an immensely uncomfortable renaissance chair. He lifted his eyes from the spittoon on the carpet to the middle-aged man who sat across from him behind the huge eighteenth century Venetian desk with its gilt scrollwork and cherubs and tooled leather top.

Enoch Dwight, the great uncle he had previously seen only in posed portraits and photographs, was far more disarming than his posed images. For one thing he was not as tall as Houghton had pictured him. And the handlebar sweep of his graying mustaches was not as impeccably groomed as camera and artist had made it. Even more astonishing was Enoch Dwight's sardonic but definite sense of humor.

"This is most extraordinary," he said in an unexpectedly high-pitched voice, regarding Houghton benignly from the tall white fortress of his collar. "You say that you have come back through time to instruct me how to arrange my affairs so that they will not be instrumental in destroying the world some fifty years hence." He looked almost as if he were laughing.

"Hardly you alone," his grandnephew told him. "But what you leave behind you will be one of a number of interlocking factors that must inevitably lead to such destruction. By alteration of purpose, by reapplication of power which you are soon to assemble, there is definite possibility that the trend of events may be swung into a channel less harmful to humanity."

"My hear Doughton—pardon me, young man, but I once took a course under Professor Spooner at Oxford and I fear the habit of twisting words is unbreakable. My dear Houghton—I am a man scarcely dedicated either to the destruction or the improvement of the world in which I find myself. I have merely sought to provide comfort and security for my family and myself and, perhaps, been a trifle more successful than the bulk of my competitors. Politics — world affairs? Save as they effect this security I care little or nothing about them."

"To maintain what you have already begun to build," said Houghton quietly, "you must care for them ever increasingly. I do not expect you to believe me—as yet. But I can furnish ample proof of my identity and of the fact that I have

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traveled backward in time."

"Hmmm," muttered Enoch Dwight. His light-blue eyes narrowed and the corners of his small mouth tightened visibly beneath the heavy sweep of hair on his upper lip. "You say that Amalgamated Wheat is going to jump four points between now and tomorrow's opening?"

"That's right, sir," Houghton assured him. His greatuncle studied him for a long moment, then reached for the elaborately impractical gold-plated telephone on the desk before him.

"Very well, young man—incidentally you do seem to favor my side of the family somewhat. My daughter is waiting for you outside. Have her arrange with Jermyn—he's the butler—to put you up here as a house guest for the time being. And have him procure you some clothing fit to be seen in." He regarded Houghton's casual 1951 sports attire with a combination of scorn and disbelief.

"Thank you, sir," said Houghton, who had not used such a term of respect for anyone since his prep-school days. But there was a quality about his Greatuncle Enoch, laissez-faire-ism, Spoonerisms and all, that demanded such courtesies.

As Houghton rose from the huge uncomfortable chair his greatuncle added, "I shall be occupied with my affairs until dinner—which is served promptly at eight, young man. Tomorrow morning—after the Market opening—you and I will discuss your extraordinary proposition further."

DISMISSED, Houghton left the room to find Alison Dwight awaiting him in the big library outside the study where her father had interviewed him. He gave the girl her father's instructions. She looked puzzled and, he thought, decidedly attractive. He wondered how she would appear in a 1952 haircut and with 1952 makeup—not that she would need much makeup with her smooth clear complexion and vivid coloring. Also the effect of 1952 fashions upon that figure. It might prove to be an experiment both interesting and decidedly worth while.

"I'm surprised that Daddy was so—easy," she told him and shook her head slowly. She added, "He can be very deceptive when he wants to."

"Thanks," said Houghton with a quick look at the closed massive door through which he had just passed. "I've got the vessel locked."

She shot him a smoky sidelong glance and the corners of her mouth quirked enchantingly. Then, "I think I'll have Jermyn put you in the east wing."

"I'd prefer the south," he told her. "That's where I have my own rooms—I mean, I like the view of the reed pond better."

"Touche," said Alison, smiling openly. "I should have known you'd have your own ideas about the

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house. Very well, the south wing it is." She moved to the wall and pulled a hanging damask bell-cord.

Jermyn, who proved to be a hound-faced sad-eyed elder statesman of unmistakably British origin, eyed Houghton's unorthodox attire with only the briefest flicker of astonishment. Then, with silent efficiency, he set about fulfilling his master's orders.

When he came downstairs for lunch Houghton felt as if he were something under glass in a wax museum, labeled *The Mauve Decade*. He wore peg-top trousers, a stiff-collared long-sleeved shirt with pleated bosom and a speckled Norfolk jacket with belt and pleats in the back. His tie might have doubled for a shoe-lace—and his shoes were pointed of toe and buttoned.

"My, aren't we handsome!" mocked Alison when he joined her at the Chippendale table in the small dining room overlooking the side lawn.

"We're choking to death," he told her, trying vainly to work a finger between collar and neck.

The luncheon—it was far more than lunch—was elaborately prepared and served and in quantity overwhelming to a young man fresh from the era of salads and ulcers. There was a heavy bean soup, served from an immense silver tureen, followed by a fish course, a roast and sherbet, potatoes, broccoli and a complex and sweet dessert—served by a footman whose aim in life seemed to be achievement of Jermyn's dolorous gravity.

As the meal progressed in stately informality Alison laid down a barrage of rapid-fire questions about the manners and modes of existence fifty years hence. She was, Houghton decided, more than living up to advance notices where her militant feminism was concerned, doing rather better than that as to looks and all-a-round attractiveness.

There was about her a fearless directness of address, a clear-eyed intellectual grasp of new things and ideas, a quick sympathy where her sensibilities were touched. There was also a soft firmness of skin above bone structure sculptured for durability, a fascinating mobility of lips, a coordinated grace of gesture. Houghton had to fight against an impulse to stare at her for embarrassing lengths of time.

"Tell me," she asked him over the *torte flambeau*, "has any woman in your time ever swum the English Channel?"

"Old stuff," he assured her. He told her of Gertrude Ederle in 1926. She was stirred pleasantly and he went on to tell her of women flyers—of Ruth Nichols and Amelia Ehrhardt, of Jacqueline Cochran and the Wasps of World War Two.

"How I'd love to be one of *them!*" Alison exclaimed fervently. She sighed, then tossed her napkin on the tablecloth and said, "How would you like to go for a drive, Dwight? We have a brand-new

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Peerless in the carriage house."

"I wouldn't dream of missing it," said Houghton, rising with her. He waited in the huge hall while she donned the motorist's uniform of leather-duster, wide-brimmed hat held on with a shawl, and goggles. And so intrigued was he already by his cousin-once-removed that he actually found her charming even in these.

They went driving together in a swaying ramshackle sputtering conveyance that boasted a rear door and a steering tiller. They traveled over dusty unpaved roads, as remarkable for their multiplicity of trolley tracks and railroad crossings as they were for their lack of highway billboards, hamburger and barbecue stands and filling stations.

Although they frightened one passing carriage horse almost to the point of becoming a runaway, for the most part Houghton found himself enjoying the lack of tempo, the peace and serenity around them. However, he could not escape a certain sense of relief when the *Peerless* put-putted back into the estate driveway without accident to tires, driving chain or motor.

THAT night at dinner in the large dining room, there were a number of important-looking guests and well-upholstered womenfolk. Houghton found himself being introduced casually as a visiting cousin and did his best to fit into the role.

There was considerable talk around and across the table about President McKinley's sudden reversal on the tariff, about the new Paris styles, about the aggressiveness of young Vice President Roosevelt. In the latter instance there seemed to be unanimity in feeling that it was a good thing for the country the ex-Rough Rider—and New York City Police Commissioner had been sidetracked into the Vice-Presidential chair.

"Mark my words," intoned a Senator Something, who tucked his napkin under his chin and dextrously employed a golden toothpick after each of the nine courses. "Mark my words, this young Roosevelt may be a scion of the Patroons but he's a born-and-bred troublemaker. If it weren't for the fact that this is generally known and appreciated in Washington I would hate to answer for the President's safety since he turned against the tariff. The bulk of our industrial leaders are dead set against his new policy—and they are not men to trifle with."

"McKinley will knuckle under," said another huge man with a voice like a sea lion. "It's the President's job to serve the people—especially the better element—rather than to lower their standard of living. Why, it's almost as if Bryan had . . ."

And so it went. There was talk of the death of Queen Victoria and the forthcoming ascension to the throne of the hitherto playboy Prince of Wales as Edward VII. Apparently it was felt that his

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mastery of games of chance ought to make him a good ruler.

Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany was brought into the conversation as an example of a man who knew how to run a great nation efficiently—although some of his socialistic ideas were decried. There was talk of Russia and its Czar Nicholas, of the hideous recent debacle of the Princeton football team under a professor-coach by the name of Woodrow Wilson.

"It just goes to show you what happens when a theoretical expert tries to meddle in practical affairs," said someone.

"Those that can, do—those that can't, teach," intoned the Senator piously. "It's a good thing he only got hold of a football team. Think what such a man would do if he got hold of a country."

At times, during the long meal, Houghton had the sensation of sitting through a rather dull period movie. He had to keep reminding himself of the desperate seriousness of his mission to prevent semi-somnolent drifting. Later, when he turned in, he had the odd feeling that none of it had happened. For here he was, in his own bed, in his own room. It might have been a dream.

THE sight, first of Jermyn's ever-sad face at his bedside the next morning, then of Alison's far more rewarding fresh countenance across the breakfast table, was sufficient to jolt Dwight Houghton back to awareness of reality.

After a crocquet game which developed into another interrogation by his cousin-once-removed, Houghton was summoned again to the Presence. Enoch Dwight regarded him with such open disbelief that for a moment he felt panic stir his diaphragm. Perhaps, he thought, the believers in parallel time-tracks were right. Perhaps in returning to the past, he had returned to a different past, make different by his journeying back into it. Worse, perhaps Amalgamated Wheat had not risen four points as predicted.

But his greatuncle quickly eased his mounting fears. He said, "Young man, I don't pretend to understand how you did it—but you were right about that little flyer in wheat you suggested yesterday. Mind you, I'm far from convinced that you are who or what you claim. You could have had knevious prowledge—pardon the Spoonerism. At any rate you'll have to provide further proof."

"At several hundred thousand dollars worth of profit a lick?" Houghton countered. The older man permitted himself a faint shrug and an enigmatic half-smile and Houghton wondered where he had ever got the idea Enoch Dwight was softer than his future reputation.

"Very well," he said quietly. "Today is Saturday. Copper Plate Rails are going to take a seven-point dive over the weekend. You should

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know what to do about that, sir. And—oh, yes—Commando will run away with the Belmont Stakes this afternoon. That should be enough for this weekend."

"It will do nicely, my boy, very nicely indeed," Enoch Dwight said, indulging in an invisible drywash. "That is, of course if they work out. By the way, I took a look at this odd-looking egg you seem to have deposited in my grove—before you were awake this morning. You say it brought you here?"

"Right, sir," said Houghton, again realizing the formidable nature of his adversary. "If you'd care to take a little jaunt into the future with me you might find it—instructive."

"Not yet, young man, not yet," said the millionaire. "I hardly think I know you well enough for that—as yet."

"As you wish," said Houghton drily. "Don't forget—Copper Plate Rails to drop, Commando to win the Belmont."

"I never," said the older man, "forget anything."

"No," Houghton told him as he rose to leave the room, "I don't believe you do, sir." He closed the big door softly behind him, found Alison batting croquet balls on the lawn, walked with her to the time vessel. There he let her get an outline of the future from some of the histories on the shelves in the lounge.

"Oh!" she exclaimed somewhat more than an hour later. "How I'd love to visit the future—*your* future. I'd give anything to see the advances women will have made, perhaps—perhaps, even to be a part of their advance."

"Isn't it a little early in the game for you to start wanting to make advances—not that *I* object," said Houghton. She turned furnace red again and he added, smiling. "In a world of man-woman equality, Alison, you can't expect to be kept on a pedestal."

"But I don't—not really," she protested. "I—I guess it's just that I'm not used to it. But I didn't say I don't like it." And, her boldness increasing, "May I have a cigarette?"

"My, aren't we devils!" said Houghton, mocking her. But he desisted at once lest he hurt her. She sat on the foam cushion of one of the wall-settees, her eyes thoughtful and far away.

"Dwight," she said finally, "do you suppose that some day I could take a trip to your time? That I could step into your world and find myself able to *do* something there? I can't begin to tell you how dull it is—how wasteful—to spend my best years sitting around waiting for some suitable male to offer to marry me."

"How about me," Houghton asked her, much to his own surprise. "As far as I know our marriage is perfectly possible—and I ought to be eminently suitable."

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"You're joking," she said. "And I'm quite serious."

"So am I," he told her and, looking at her, Houghton understood with a sudden surge of emotion that he meant it.

She blushed again—more than he had yet seen her. "I mean—I'm serious about going into the future, Dwight. After all—"

"—after all, we hardly know each other," he finished for her. He frowned, added, "Perhaps we could rig it, Alison. It might be risky but I don't really see why not if you actually want to."

"Want to!" she breathed with lips parted. "Dwight, I'd do literally anything to see life fifty years from now—while I am still young."

"Famous last words," he told her drily, getting to his feet. "Well, we'll see what we can do. I've got to stick around until I get the whip hand of that unreconstructed father of yours."

"What's 'unreconstructed', Dwight?" she asked him.

* * *

COMMANDO came in as prophesied to win the Belmont that afternoon and, once the news was learned at the Dwight mansion over the telephone, there was a mild sensation. Alison, who had taken a small flyer herself through the offices of the housekeeper, who knew a man who knew a bookmaker, actually kissed Houghton quickly on the cheek in starry-eyed gratitude when they stood alone in the great hall before dinner.

"You don't get away with that," he whispered and pulled her close against him and did a more thorough job.

She pulled gently away after a quick stirring moment of response and said softly, "You meant that, Dwight—didn't you?"

"So much so," he told her firmly, "that I'm going to take you into my own era, where we can do it without having all this junk between us." He brushed disgustedly at the stiff bosom of his borrowed evening shirt, gave a meaningful glance at Alison's satin clad rigidly-corseted figure.

"Dwight!" she whispered, pleasantly shocked. A soft low murmur of laughter accompanied the exclamation. Houghton made a move to repeat the embrace but they heard her father approaching through the library and drew apart barely in time. The financier regarded them shrewdly but withheld any pointed remarks in favor of routine banalities.

Later that evening Houghton talked at length to his greatuncle—a talk that was continued through the Sunday that followed. From the time vessel he brought books and documents to prove his statements. Bit by bit, deal by deal, he showed Enoch Dwight how the increase of his wealth implied an increase of

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power—ultimately an increase of behind-the-scenes control in a swiftly-changing and uncertain world.

"You can see what Carnegie and the Guggenheims and the Rockefellers have done with their money," Houghton told him. He went on to explain the theory of the responsibility of great wealth, to reveal how these great fortunes were used to implement human progress and culture.

Finally he said, "And you can see how the ruling trust you will set up to manage and increase your estate absolutely precludes its power and wealth being employed for any purpose but to gather more power and wealth for itself."

"Hmmmm," mused Enoch Dwight with the faint trace of a smile behind his mustaches, "I'm going to take it mough for them, eh, young man? Excuse the Spoonerism, if you will."

"Certainly," said Houghton, suppressing a sigh. "You made it extremely tough for them in my world at any rate. Now, if you'll study these charts I've had prepared, you'll see clearly how application of the power of the estate against the rising international cartels of the nineteen-twenties could be a major factor in preventing the rise of dictatorships following the financial crash of nineteen twenty-nine."

"You wouldn't teach an old-timer like me how to suck eggs?" Enoch Dwight inquired with a chuckle. "I understand you well enough, young man—providing that Congress is ever damfool enough to pass the taxes and legal restrictions you say it will."

"Never fear, sir—they will," Houghton told him bluntly. "And if you want to take a chance on another little bet, lay any odds you can get that the President will be killed by an assassin in Buffalo before the year is out."

"That sounds reasonable enough," said Enoch Dwight disinterestedly. Then, "And you say this young Ford and the Wright brothers are persons worth watching? That's odd—I've been thinking that these horseless carriages were just a passing fad."

Throughout the course of their discussions the younger man patiently explained the curve of the future to his greatuncle, revealing the seeds of growth to come that the decades ahead had already revealed to him. His greatuncle listened shrewdly, nodding now and then, asking occasional shrewd questions, committing his Spoonerisms, never taking notes.

WITH Monday came word that Copper Plate Rails had taken the seven-point drop Houghton had foretold. From then on there was no question of his being believed. The discussions continued through Tuesday and Wednesday. Houghton felt that he was making real progress on his mission.

From time to time Enoch Dwight

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asked him personal questions—about himself, about Houghton's parents, about people he knew. He even revealed an increasing curiosity toward the time vessel, although he categorically refused to set foot inside it. His respect for his grandnephew seemed to grow with each passing day.

"I think he's beginning to see the light," Houghton told Alison in the time vessel. It was Thursday afternoon and one of their increasingly rare times alone together. "I think I'm going to put it over."

"Dwight, dear," the girl said thoughtfully, looking up from one of the volumes of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in which she had been delving, "do you really believe you can alter the future by changing the past?"

"I wouldn't be here if I didn't hope to," he told her. Then, "Why, don't you?"

"The more I learn about you and your world and what you're trying to do, the less I think I know about anything," she replied slowly. "Dwight, I admire you tremendously for this—you'd call it a 'pitch'—but, honey, I'm a little bit frightened."

"You'd be pretty subnormal if you weren't," Houghton told her reassuringly. "It scares me—and I've had fifty years of preparation for it—me and my era, that is."

"Perhaps you're right," she replied. "Oh, I hope so!" Then, dropping her eyes and fingering the foam-rubber cushion beneath her, "Dwight, do you think I'd—get by in your world?"

"You'd be a five-ply knockout," he told her with enthusiasm that brought color to her face. "You're already beginning to look more like a live girl and less like a period piece. In that dress—if you'd get your hair cut and waved and put on some lipstick—you'd have trouble not winding up on a magazine cover."

"It's very daring—this dress—though I don't suppose it seems so to you," she said with a smile. Then, "And all I have to do to put this vessel of yours into your laboratory yard is to set the date there on the dial and put the locator to *base* and press that switch over there?"

"That's right, Ally," he told her. "But don't be getting too many ideas. *I* don't want to be responsible for your disappearance. Besides, it isn't time for you to vanish yet."

"Why don't you take me there—right now?" she asked him, her smoky blue eyes alight with excitement. "All you'd have to do whenever we felt like it is bring it back to the now. Then we wouldn't seem to have been gone from here at all."

Houghton was tempted. He was turning over the idea in his mind, was on the brink of acceptance—when a buzz from the outside of the vessel made them both jump. With a sigh Houghton went forward and opened the oval port. Jermyn, wearing a faint but distinct look of

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disapproval, was standing on the grass outside with word that Enoch Dwight wished to see Houghton at once in his study. With a grimace for Alison, Houghton hastened to comply.

"Come on and walk back to the house with me," he said. But the girl smiled and shook her head and held up the book she had been reading.

"I've got to bone up on the styles of nineteen fifty-two," she told him. "Just in case you give in and take me there."

He grinned and threw her a kiss and scrambled out of the vessel to where the butler was waiting. They had just reached the gap in the high hedge when a sudden flash of blue light from the trees at their rear stopped Houghton in his tracks. He turned, his face white with tension, knowing too well what had happened. And then he began to run back through the trees without a word. Jermyn trotted after him at a more dignified pace.

Houghton had just reached the rim of the now-empty clearing when the blue flash came again, temporarily blinding both men. The egg-shaped time vessel reappeared as suddenly as it had vanished. Houghton ran toward it and the oval port opened and Alison came tumbling out of it and into his arms.

A DRY cough from the line of the trees behind them brought them both out of their embrace. Houghton flicked a glance at Jermyn, whose disapproval had mounted to shocking proportions, then glanced at Alison—and felt his own jaw drop.

Charles Dana Gibson had vanished in favor of something very akin to the ideal of George Petty. This Alison Dwight still had copper-colored hair, yes—but it fell alluringly in soft waves to her shoulders. She wore a white blouse with a plunging neckline, very brief shorts and moccasins. She seemed at once older and younger than the girl of less than a minute before.

"How long were you away, Ally?" Houghton asked her.

"About six months," she told him. She sighed and added, "Oh, Dwight, it was so wonderful—and so terrible, all at once. All that marvellous freedom, all that ease of living for almost everyone—yet all that horrible fear and tension!"

They stood, arms linked, Enoch Dwight's summons forgotten. Houghton could not take his eyes off the girl and what she had become so swiftly through the paradox of time travel.

She said, "And, darling, I've missed you so. If I hadn't known I could get back to you so quickly I'd never have stuck it out as long as I did. I have no idea my cousin-once-removed was such a glamourpuss. And so important! Darling, everyone I met swears by you."

"When they're not too busy swear-

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ing *at* me," he replied with a trace of apprehension. "Listen, Ally, how did you arrange things—I mean, how did you get along in my time?"

"It was a snap," she replied with a proud little smile. "My arrival kicked up considerable stir, of course. But when I told Bart Forsythe who I was and fibbed him into believing you wanted me to get acquainted with your world, he made everything smooth as silk."

"Good old Bart," said Houghton. He let his mind dwell briefly on the selfless devotion of his former school and college roommate, who had given up a promising business career to become his personal agent and trouble shooter. "Yes, Bart would have seen to it. Did you get a look at all you wanted?"

"More, much more," she told him, "and not enough, of course. Dwight, I'll never again be happy back here in this stuffy old world. When I think of the clothes I'll have to wear if I stay here and . . . Darling, you won't leave me here, will you? I don't think I could bear it. How long was I gone?"

"About ninety seconds," Houghton told her. "You handled the vessel beautifully." He looked at her with mock-fierceness. "But don't try to make me believe you've been a good girl in a free and alien world for all of six months. I won't believe it—you're much too beautiful."

"I managed," she said simply and he believed her. Jermyn appeared from the trees then, carrying a long cloak, which Dwight promptly draped about his cousin-once-removed.

"I don't pretend to understand any of this, Miss Alison," the butler told the girl. "But if the Master were ever to see you like that . . ."

"Enough said, Jermyn," Houghton told him in reply. "Let's go, Ally. I forgot about your father."

THE millionaire had a new and complex set of questions about debentures to ask his grandnephew, questions which endured through an interminable hour and a half. Somehow Houghton managed to answer them although he was almost unbearably impatient to be again with the older man's daughter. Finally, when it was approaching time to dress for dinner, Enoch Dwight pronounced the inquisition finished.

"Young man," he said, after looking at his heavy and ornate gold watch, "since your arrival here you have been of immeasurable assistance to me and my affairs. Whether or not you are actually my grandnephew I am scarcely prepared to decide at present. But you seem very definitely to be somebody and your strange fore-knowledge has helped me greatly. I am not a man who likes to leave his pets undaid—your pardon."

"Yes, sir," said Houghton, who was becoming used to the older man's word-twisting propensities.

"Now—I am going abroad for six months to look after my foreign interests in the new light of your in-

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formation," Enoch Dwight stated. "During that time you are free to stay here as a guest if you wish—or you may return whence you came." He paused.

"Naturally," he said after a moment, "I am taking my daughter with me on this trip." He eyed Houghton keenly and seemed to derive some obscure enjoyment from the perturbation which his grandnephew was unable to conceal. "I have not," he added drily, "been entirely unaware of the attachment that seems to have developed between you."

"There has been absolutely no attempt at concealment," Houghton told him, feeling his own color rise.

"Of course not—since I have made no effort to put obstacles in your path—until now," said the millionaire. "My trip is going to be chiefly occupied by business. When I return here, if what you have told me is true, I am going to die and my daughter is going to vanish mysteriously. Is that correct?"

"According to the records," said Houghton, feeling lost. "But, sir—"

"Records can be fixed," snapped the older man. "I happen to be in most excellent health and I have no intention of dying this year. Is that clear, young man? As for my daughter, I have already acquired some ideas as to how her disappearance is to come about. I think you will understand."

"I think perhaps I do," said Houghton uneasily. "But perhaps if you could be more explicit . . ."

"I think you understand well enough, young man," the older man told him. He cleared his throat, added, "Now—when I return here on the eleventh of December I want both you and your—er—ship here. By the way, I believe you told me that you can direct her to any destination you wish on earth—as well as to any time?"

"That is correct," the younger man told him, feeling as if the entire play had been usurped by his great-uncle. "At any rate it's worked perfectly so far. Of course, when it comes to dealing with the space-time continuum there is always a margin of—"

"I detest speculation, young man," said Enoch Dwight severely. "If you are here when we return I shall feel certain that your vessel is safe for me to enter. At that time I shall want you to transport me to a certain place in your own time that will be prepared for me. I take it you can carry passengers?"

"A reasonable number, sir," said Houghton, feeling as if a mule had planted its hoofs in his solar plexus. "But, sir, is it really necessary for you to keep Ally—your daughter and myself apart for so long? After all, I am eminently eligible in my world at any rate and we have only just—"

"Naturally, young man, you wish to improve your mutual acquaintance," said Enoch Dwight with a chuckle that made Houghton want

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to hit him.

"Naturally," he said, muffling the impulse.

"Very well, young man, *if* you are here when we return to this house in December—and *if* you and my daughter are still of the same mind—and *if* you can take me where and when I wish to be taken at that time—*then* I shall have no objections. No objections whatever." He concluded with an airy gesture, "I have already informed you that I do not like to leave any debts unpaid—and I feel, young man, that I owe you much."

"Very well," said Houghton in turn. He sighed, added, "I suppose it's fair enough—but hard. I trust you understand fully the reasons why you must alter the nature of your business affairs if the world is to be saved."

"Don't worry about that, young man," said the millionaire, rising sprily from behind his immense desk. "There are going to be plenty of changes made. Now—shall we doin my jaughter at table?"

* * *

ENOCH Dwight and Alison were gone the next morning before he awoke—and Houghton wondered if perhaps his greatuncle hadn't put a drop or two of something into the after-dinner brandy to make sure he overslept. He sat on the side of the bed and smoked a cigarette and thought things over, not entirely liking the course of recent events.

The idea of a six-months wait for Alison was unbearable—for what if Enoch Dwight were to maneuver her into marriage with some dissolute princeling overseas? What if the girl's disappearance were some underhanded contrival of her father? He wished he had an inkling of what the millionaire was planning to do on his return. Less and less did he feel able to trust his great-uncle.

Then he took a mental reef in himself and tamped out his cigarette. With the time vessel waiting his period of separation from Alison could be one of minutes rather than months. He was humming faintly when he summoned Jermyn and asked the butler to fetch him the clothes in which he had arrived at the great house. After breakfast, feeling comfortable for the first time in days, he strolled alone across the lawn toward the ship in the woods.

Bart Forsythe was relieved and overjoyed to see him. He answered Houghton's endless questions about Alison and her visit to his own time with an amiability that bespoke his fondness for his employer's supposedly vanished cousin-once-removed.

"What do you suppose did happen to her?" Forsythe asked when Houghton at last seemed satisfied.

"I'm not sure—yet," said Houghton. "But I intend to have a hand in it if she'll let me."

"I don't think you'll have any

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trouble about that," said Forsythe, smiling. "If ever I saw a girl in love it was Alison."

"It's not Alison I'm worried about," said Houghton. "Now here's what I want you and the boys to work on. We need some sort of tracer beam on the vessel—something that will give you at this end an accurate idea of where and when we are. And we're going to need a system of signals along with it—in case of trouble. Now here's roughly the principle I have in mind for it. If you take a new-model radar detector and involute its function with . . ."

Later, when his ideas had been digested, he held consultation with the small group of top-flight scientists he employed for research and development in his private laboratories. As always they were quick to scent what he wanted, to propose more practical methods of accomplishment. He told them when he wanted it and left the rest of it up to them.

In spite of his desire to return for Alison, he had many things to attend to in his own time. His motion picture interests demanded a flying trip to Hollywood. He was called before a board of Congressional inquiry that was seeking to indict him for the indissoluble ties and trends to which Enoch Dwight had fastened the ever-growing Houghton-Dwight estate.

Then there was a high-pressure jaunt to a Midwest plant which was manufacturing a new type of turbo-rocket engine. A snag in labor-management had developed which had stalled the work and it was up to Houghton himself to get things running again.

By the time he got back to New York his scientists had installed both tracer-beam and laboratory listening post. He congratulated them, checked their work and found it satisfactory. Then, again in casual sports clothes, he locked himself in the time vessel and headed it for the clearing in the grove—the date set for midmorning of December 11, 1901.

HE arrived a little late. They were waiting for him when he rematerialized in the grove—Alison, her father and a distinctly foreign-looking lady wrapped in furs and a veil beneath an ostrich plume hat. Enoch Dwight regarded him sardonically, watch in hand.

"Thought you weren't going to get here," he snapped. "Well, now that you are here, let's get going. Have you room for the luggage, young man, in this insane contraption of yours?"

"Plenty," said Houghton curtly. He glanced at Alison, who was revealing a mixture of joyous relief and outright panic. She looked pale and thin and tired and he decided she had had a rugged time of it in Europe. He went to her and kissed her boldly.

"Time for that later," said Enoch

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Dwight nervously. He presented the lady in the ostrich plumes. "Countess Zarinka—my self-proclaimed grandnephew, Dwight Houghton. He's our chauffeur."

Evidently Enoch Dwight was in a hurry. He actually helped Houghton to get the dozen heavy pieces of luggage inside the vessel although he was clearly unused to manual labor. Houghton obeyed orders with a sense of mounting bewilderment.

"Watch Dad—I'm terrified," Alison managed to whisper as she passed him to enter the vessel. Houghton managed what he hoped was a reassuring smile and set about closing the port-locks. Finished, he turned toward the instrument board—to be checked by a cold female voice with a harsh Middle-European accent.

"You will please sit down—in the rear," said the Countess Zarinka. From her leather handbag she had produced a revolver—a pearl-handled affair—which she was pointing straight at Alison.

"Daddy!" the girl cried in horror. "You're not going to . . ."

"I'm not having either of you killed if that's what you mean," snapped the millionaire, who had seated himself at the instrument panels. "Alison, I warned you to forget him and stay in Europe. You could have married that Russian lad—the prince."

"Thanks, kid," said Houghton warmly to the girl. Now that things were in the open and coming to a head he felt better. The oppression that had lingered since his last sight of Alison was gone. He glanced at Enoch Dwight and said, "All right, what's the plan?" He all but called it a caper.

"I want direction to Burberry Lodge in New Mexico," said the older man. "You must know where it is if you're truly my grandnephew. Then sit back with my daughter. I'll do the rest; Alison has taught me enough to run this contraption."

"Oh, Dwight—I'm sorry!" said the girl. "I had no idea."

"Steady, darling," Houghton told her. He obeyed orders implicitly, not forgetting the cold-voiced "countess" and her pistol pointed at Alison. While the millionaire might not wish harm to his daughter Houghton had no illusions about his woman friend.

"This will get you there," he said, straightening from the panel. "When do you wish to arrive there?"

"I told you I'd take care of that," said Enoch Dwight testily. Houghton shrugged and went back to the girl and sat beside her on a settee with his arm about her. The countess regarded them with open contempt as they kissed.

"Verrrrry touching," she said in heavily-accented tones.

"This, I take it," said Houghton, to Alison, with a nod toward the countess, "is something your father picked up on the side?"

The girl nodded and, without

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warning, burst into tears. "Darling," she sobbed, "I'm terrified. Daddy's changed. Ever since we left home he's been planning things — awful things with awful people. And now he's arranged to die—officially, I mean—back in our time and hide out in the future with *her*."

"I'm afraid the countess is going to be up against a level of competition she never dreamed of," said Houghton quietly.

"*Taisez-vous!*" said the countess angrily. She shifted her considerable hips uneasily under the casual contempt of his regard.

In the brief interval of their voyage Houghton began to acquire a glimmering of what was happening. He began to understand for the first time both the magnitude and malevolence of his greatuncle's plan—and it had plenty of both.

What or who was to be buried in Enoch Dwight's coffin the younger man neither knew nor cared at the moment. But the folly of his own role was all too glaringly evident. By going back to the past and attempting to swerve his greatuncle from his acquisitive course, he had merely enabled Enoch Dwight to make his plans foolproof. He himself had charted the entire uncanny course of successful investments that were to make the Houghton-Dwight estate one of the most powerful influences in the entire world.

Dwight, of course, was planning to hide out with this woman as his companion until he selected a propitious moment to reappear and claim his billions of dollars in winnings. He was counting on his immense wealth to clear him of any legal difficulties in connection with his false burial.

THEY reached their destination according to the instruments and at an order from his greatuncle Houghton opened the port. They had not come in perfectly — they were deep in sand—but the rambling Lodge and its outbuildings were clear and hot before them in the sunlight. The whole vast desert estate had a stripped desolate appearance that seemed to cause Enoch Dwight concern.

"Dammit, where are the servants?" he said, staring at the huge house and tugging his mustaches. "I left orders . . . "

"The Lodge hasn't been used for years," Houghton told him with a flicker of amusement. "In fact, while you were abroad—"

"Never mind—they'll be here." Enoch Dwight cut him off irritably. Then, surperciliously, "It doesn't always require a time machine to control the future, young man. Planning can achieve the same results. Very well, since the staff hasn't arrived, get the luggage into the Lodge. All save that black satchel."

Alison gave him a hand and Houghton knew her pride too well to ask her not to. The countess and her weapon stood guard over them until the job was done. Once in the

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lodge Enoch Dwight, who seemed vastly pleased with his newfound ability as a time pilot, got out some ancient London Dock brandy.

"Some heads are going to roll over the servants not being here," said the tycoon. "But until they come . . . " He eyed the countess and there was no mistaking either the import of his look or the invitation he received from the ample adventuress.

Alison, at Houghton's side, whispered, "I'd like to—oh, Dwight, he isn't fit to live! I hope you don't think I'm horrible, darling, but if you knew some of the things he tried to have me do abroad . . . "

"Relax," Houghton told her softly. "This isn't over yet."

"Take your licking like a man, young fellow," said Enoch Dwight not unkindly. He looked at Alison, added, "I'm afraid I'll have to detain you both here for awhile—not that it will be exactly a house party for any of us. But in a whittle lile you may go wherever you wish."

He studied them, shaking his head as if wondering how such soft- fibred creatures could stem from the same seed as himself. Then he said, "You have the freedom of the house and the walled compound in back. But I hardly think you'll find it easy to get away across the desert. So if I were you—"

He was interrupted by a sudden dull explosion from outside. Through a fogged front window Dwight saw that the vessel was lying at an odd tilt in its sandy bed. Suddenly he recalled the black satchel his great-uncle had ordered left inside it.

"Bomb?" he asked. Enoch Dwight nodded, almost purring.

He said, "Sorry, young man, but I can't afford to take chances. And you can build yourself another one later." He might have been talking of some child's plaything rather than the most remarkable invention yet achieved by man.

With the destruction of the time vessel Enoch Dwight and his countess seemed to relax. They pulled linen dust-covers from some of the furniture and began to tackle the brandy seriously. At intervals the billionaire grumbled audibly at the continued absence of the staff. Then, with the passing of time, he grew more and more engrossed in the countess.

Finally in disgust Houghton led a shivering but grateful Alison into the compound. The girl's whole manner was of defeat. She said, "He's won—he always wins. If we could only do *some*thing— but the age of miracles is past, except for your time machine. And now he's destroyed that!"

"Don't give up the ship, darling," Houghton told her. "Contrary to both your fond beliefs, your esteemed parent does not know all the factors involved." He looked toward the pale northeast sky and added, "We've been here over four hours. It's about time."

"Time for what?" she asked, a

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spark of hope in her voice.

"Shut up—and listen," he said rudely, cocking an ear. From somewhere far away came a faint humming sound — a hum that grew steadily louder and more distinct. Houghton squinted to see further and Alison's eyes widened incredulously at sight of a silver speck that rapidly took on size and shape as it sped toward them.

"GOOD old Bart!" said Houghton. He smiled and his smile grew and he waved frantically as the air-vehicle roared low above them, stopped and hovered with incredible abruptness to descend toward them slowly with an unlocking of whirling helicopter vanes.

"It *is*—it's Bart!" cried the girl as a head and waving arm appeared through a window in the side of the ship.

"We worked a tracer system out ourselves," Houghton shouted to Alison to be heard above the roar of the plane. "The minute we came down here instead of at Base, Bart had orders to move in with the new ship. Oh-*oh*—trouble!"

Roused by the sound of the heliplane Enoch Dwight and the countess burst out of one of the french windows of the Lodge. The billionaire was yelling and waving his arms incoherently and the countess was brandishing her revolver.

"In you go," cried Houghton as the heliplane hovered a scant foot above the compound floor. He gave the girl a shove through the door, scrambled in after her as a bullet pinged past only inches from his head.

He slammed the door quickly shut behind him and said to Bart, "Get us out of here—quick!" Another bullet smacked into the tough thin metal of which the heliplane was built.

"Don't worry—we're off. Brace yourselves," said Bart. They were barely fifty feet above the ground and the countess was still firing wildly when he cut in the jets. The whirling vanes were all but stripped loose as they folded and the plane roared away, rising with incredible speed above the rolling desert sands.

"What's *your* hurry?" gasped Houghton, gasping from the acceleration as he straightened in his seat to give quick physical assurance to a pea-green Alison. "We're out of range of that popgun."

"Yeah?" said Bart, lifting his voice above the roar of the jets, which was loud even in the soundproofed cabin. "Don't you know what day this is?"

"The old so-and-so wouldn't let me look at the date he rigged the time vessel for," he called back as he assisted a rapidly-recovering Alison toward comfort across the aisle.

"Well, it's May twenty-first," Bart informed him.

Houghton opened his mouth for a so-what, then closed it abruptly. It was his turn to pale. He did not need to ask the year—the fact of

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Bart Forsythe's panic told him all he had to know. He said, "We've got to go back and get them out, Bart."

"Not a chance — it's too late," Forsythe called. "We'll be lucky if we're not shot down when we hit the rim of the area. The Military raised hell about my coming in just now."

He gave the experimental craft another notch as he spoke and the miles unreeled below them even faster. Miles and miles of desolate desert brush and sand, dotted only rarely with an occasional mote representing ghost ranch or ghost mine or ghost town—but never a sign of human or even animal life.

"What is it—what's wrong?" a bewildered Alison inquired.

"Look back," said Houghton grimly, craning his own neck as the heliplane gave a sudden lurch, like a surfboard picked up from behind by a Pacific roller.

Far behind them, slightly to the south, the heavens were livid with a tremendous rapidly-rising cloud. It gleamed and twisted evilly as it rose and spread toward the zenith. The swift little heliplane did a dance that had Bart wrestling the controls.

"What *is* it?" the girl asked again. The fear in her eyes told Houghton that she had guessed at least part of what had happened. He pulled her hand into his and held it before he spoke.

"Your father wouldn't tell me his date of return to the future," he said. "That's why his servants failed to get to the Lodge. This whole area has been blocked off by the Army. You see, while you were in Europe, I turned it over to the Government. That was the first experimental H-bomb that just went up. Burberry Lodge, and your father, have ceased to exist."

Alison covered her face with her hands and wept.

THE END

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"You'll run with my sarong and I'll chase you . . ."

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THE THIRD EAR

By

Paul W. Fairman

Gary got a bump on the head—and another ear! What he heard with it was none of his business —or was it? That girl in red, for instance . . .

IT was most embarrassing. Also, it was painful. To slip on wet pavement, pitch headlong, and go sliding through evening traffic until a lamppost barred the way, was an experience Gary wouldn't have wished even upon his tax collector. And the way those stupid pedestrians reacted! Standing around like so many sheep until one stupid goof rushed up to ask cheerfully:

"Did you bump your head, pal?"

Good lord! How could he doubt it? The sound of skull meeting lamppost must have startled people for blocks around.

Gary struggled to his feet while the sidewalk buckled and weaved before his glazed eyes. Someone handed him his briefcase while the happy goof picked up his hat and straightened it out.

"You'll have to get this cleaned, pal. It's kind of dirty."

The embarrassment had a great deal to do with the swift clearing of Gary's head. He snatched the briefcase and the hat, jammed the latter item on his head, mumbled a "thank you," and took off down the street.

He was exceedingly angry with himself at such clumsiness. He'd walked that stretch of pavement, rain and shine, a thousand times, what with his place of employment just down the block, and had never fallen down before. But tonight, like a club-footed idiot— He glanced around with marked guilt, found himself a good two blocks from the scene, and stopped under an awning out of the drizzle to take inventory of the damage. The hat wasn't so bad and his raincoat had protected his clothing pretty well. But golly how his head hurt. He glanced up to discover he was standing in front of a drugstore. He went inside.

The aspirin worked fast and the black coffee functioned with such efficiency that he was hurrying toward his bus stop ten minutes later with only a remnant of the pain still left in his head.

It seemed, however, that this was

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going to be an evening to remember—an evening marked with bewildering and frustrating incidents. The second of these occurred while he stood waiting for his bus. He was very close to the curb and as the bus cut out of traffic to make its stop, Gary stepped back quickly, thus to avoid the spray of mud and water, from the tires. Someone was standing close behind him. A hostile voice—a voice with a snarl—said:

"Watch it you blank son-of-a blank blank blank!"

Gary's hair stood suddenly on end because there really weren't any blanks in the speech at all. The true words were eloquent even beyond the point of insult; eloquent enough to turn any man fighting mad. Gary whirled, fists doubled, to face whoever he'd jostled while backing away from the curb.

He beheld a meek-appearing little man of not more than five and a half feet. The man wore a black coat and a derby. He lifted the derby, smiled timidly, and said, "Sorry I bumped you. I was looking the other way. Rotten night isn't it?"

Beyond all doubt, the little man was sincere in his apology. Gary could recognize the sincerity even in his anger. And too, the first voice had been of a different timbre. Gary blinked, realizing no one was within earshot except the little man and a very attractive girl in a red raincoat. The girl, intrigued by Gary's sudden, belligerent movement, was eyeing him with curiosity. The bus door was open now and Gary stepped back instinctively to let the girl board it first. Gary followed her and the meek little man brought up the rear.

The bus was well filled. The little man found a seat up front, but Gary, like an obedient commuter, moved to the back. The motor roared; the bus lumbered into movement, and Gary found himself packed in close to the girl in the red raincoat. Very close.

It was one of those "intimacy with a complete stranger" situations made so commonplace by crowded transit lines. The girl's damp hair, made fragrant by some subtle perfume, brushed against Gary's collar. Her face was not visible to him, but the curve of her back was by necessity, on speaking terms with his arm. Withal, a pleasant situation but one made suddenly bewildering by the third untoward incident of the evening. A husky female voice, loaded with invitation:

"You were going to slug the little guy, weren't you? I'll bet he'd have looked funny lying on the sidewalk wondering what it was all about."

Gary gulped. He felt—or thought he felt—a movement of the girl's shoulders indicating controlled mirth. He gulped again, wondering what to do; whether to answer or—

"You're quite a hunk of man, Slugger. Really you are. You're the kind of a hunk gals like to dream about. The kind they'd like to lose

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their inhibitions with on a desert island."

The girl had turned her head partially so Gary could catch her profile and study the long lashes over one blue eye. The eye took him in very quickly, then she turned back and her hair was again in his face.

"Suppose we had an island, you and I. Just the two of us down where it's summer all the time. You'd only wear a pair of pink shorts—skimpy shorts—and I'd wear a sarong except when we went swimming and then maybe you'd grab it and run with it and I'd have to come out of the water and chase you down the beach to get it back. I wonder if Mom's going to have hamburger again for supper?"

Gary had long since given up any thought of answering the girl. But he *was* human, and no doubt his arm pressed more tightly against the curve of her back. What he'd heard was certainly intriguing, but it was nothing to what came next.

"There's a ladder by my window and after dark you come up the ladder and the window will be unlocked and I've got a filmy nightgown I'll wear. Then you'll blank blank blank and there'll be nothing I can do about it but blank and after that we'll b——l——a——n——k b——l——a——n——k. BLANK!"

The girl turned clear around now. She eyed Gary coolly. "Would you let me pass please?"

There hadn't really been any blanks here either and Gary's smile was one no man in the world could have kept from turning on the girl in red. And probably his arms did not move quickly enough.

But the girl's arm moved. It came around in an arc and her hand smacked against Gary's jaw with a crack that was heard up and down the bus. Then she pushed past him, her expression icy, hostile, indignant.

FIVE minutes later, Gary arrived at his boarding house. He unlocked the door, his face still burning from the humiliation of the bus incident. There was no one in the hall. Gary climbed the stairs and entered his room like a criminal seeking sanctuary. He dropped onto the bed and sat staring at the wall. He was miserable, confused, and closer to panic than he'd ever been in his life.

What was going on? What had happened to him? Was he awake, or had all this been a dream? He took off his hat and probed careful fingers at the sizable goose egg on his head. It was perched on the exact center of his skull and could have been another little head growing out of his old one. And the bump was no dream.

I fell down, he thought. I slipped on the sidewalk and smashed into a lamppost. Then some guy called me a blank blank and nobody was there. At least nobody capable of calling anybody a blank blank blank.

Then I got on the bus and a very beautiful girl began suggesting a

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program of action that people only dream about. Then she slapped my face. What's happening? Am I going crazy?

There was a knock on the door. Gary said come in and Mrs. Larkin appeared with clean towels over her arm. She was a fat, comfortable woman with a motherly voice. "I forgot your towels until I heard you in the hall, Gary. So I brought them up. Miserable night isn't it?"

Gary nodded and Mrs. Larkin put the towels on their rack.

"Thirty years old and not married. There must be something abnormal about you."

Gary jerked in surprise. "What did you say?"

Mrs. Larkin turned—also in surprise. "I said it was a miserable night wasn't it—isn't it.?"

"But you said something else. After that."

"No. I just said it was a nice night—I mean a bad night. Nothing else."

"I'm going to have to raise your rent. You eat too much. Three helpings last night. I'm losing money."

Mrs. Larkin, moving toward the door, stopped to stare at Gary. "Aren't you feeling well, son? You look—"

Gary's eyes were wide, fixed. "How do I look?"

"Well—kind of wild somehow."

"Have you been on a bender? I'll have no drunks in my house!"

Gary's throat worked while he struggled for words. "There's somebody in this room!"

"Of course there is. You and I." Mrs. Larkin frowned as she caught sight of Gary's bump. "You're hurt! What happened?"

Gary didn't answer. He got up and walked to the door. Out into the hall. Down into the street. The street was deserted. The lights burned high and lonely.

"I'm going crazy," Gary said. The even beat of his footsteps echoed against the buildings. "Going crazy."

* * *

FATHER Carney looked with satisfaction at the board and said blandly, "I've yet to find a Jew—especially a rabbi—who could play a decent game of chess."

On the other side of the table, Rabbi Paul Glenman stared pensively at the pieces. "And I've yet to see a Roman Catholic—especially a black Irish priest—who wasn't a fool for luck. You got out of that one because of the sheer brilliance of your guardian angel."

"And by a superior knowledge of chess."

Paul Glenman's dark eyes were smoky from deep thought. Then the smoke gave place to a twinkle as he grinned and reached his hand toward a knight. "Oh my reverend friend!" he chuckled. "The angel must have gone out for coffee."

Father Carney's beautific smile vanished as he saw the move. But his opponent never made it because at

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that moment the door opened and Father Carney's housekeeper said, "Father, there's a young man here—"

She got no further. The young man pushed past her, so entirely distraught as to be oblivious of the discourtesy.

"Father Carney."

"Gary Mason! Why Gary my boy! You look as though half a dozen of the Finest were after you. What's the trouble?"

"I've—I've got to talk to you."

Rabbi Glenman drew back his hand and looked with interest at the young man. Gary Mason returned the look. He saw a handsome, dark-eyed man with thinning hair and a pair of muscular shoulders.

Father Carney said, "This is Rabbi Glenman, Gary. A sworn enemy of mine. Thinks he can play chess. Pull up a chair and sit down."

Recollection and a sudden respect dawned in Gary's eyes. He sat down. "There was a football Glenman—shortly after the Four Horsemen graduated."

"And a boxing Glenman," Father Carney added with relish. "The shortest career on record, I believe. Fourteen seconds in the first round at—"

Glenman's hand went toward his chin in a reminiscent gesture. "That was all a long time ago. Glad to know you, Mason."

Introductions over, Gary's thoughts went back to his own troubles. He glanced uncertainly at the rabbi.

"You seem upset Gary," Father Carney said.

"Yes—"

"Something of a spiritual nature?"

"Well, not exactly. Maybe I'd better come back when—"

"No. Not at all. Speak right up. Rabbi Glenman has been known to solve problems in his time. Simple ones that is."

The dig went over the rabbi's head, his complete attention being riveted upon Gary. The latter ran a hand through his hair and said, "It's just that—that I don't know what to do, or which way to turn! Maybe I should have gone to a doctor, but—"

"There will be time for that." The kindly priest put elbows on the table and steepled his fingers. "Perhaps you could be more explicit."

"I'm going crazy. I hear voices."

Father Carney glanced at Glenman, then back at Gary. "Tell us about it."

"I was getting on the bus and a man swore at me. I turned to look and no one was there."

"No one?" Glenman asked sharply.

"Well, only a timid little man who apologized. No one who could have cursed at me. Then I got on the bus and a girl's voice made—made—"

"Made what, Gary?"

"Indecent proposals."

"And no girl was present?"

"Yes there was. But it couldn't

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have been her—she—ah she slapped my face."

"*You* made an indecent proposal back at her?" Father Carney demanded sternly.

"No. Of course not."

"Then why did she—"

Rabbi Glenman held up his hand. "Take it easy, John. You're only confusing him." Glenman turned to Gary. "Were there any other such incidents as these?"

"Yes. When I got home my landlady came into my room. I heard certain remarks made by — by a strange voice. It wasn't her's."

Glenman's eyes narrowed and he took on a certain alertness of manner. "Tell me—these remarks. What was the nature of them? Were they statements your landlady *could* have made. I mean if she had made them would they have been logical in coming from her lips?"

Gary thought for a moment and then nodded. "Yes, but they were in a different voice entirely—"

Rabbi Glenman was on his feet. He took a step toward Gary and was scrutinizing the bump on his head. "When did this happen?"

Father Carney came forward to look. "Good heavens, son! Were you attacked?"

"No. I fell down and hit a lamppost. But it's nothing really. I—"

"It may be a great deal," Glenman said, "Did it happen before you heard the voices, or afterwards?"

"Why—why it happened before, but—"

Father Carney frowned at his chess opponent. "Does it look serious to you?"

Glenman shook his head. "Not medically. I'm sure there's no concussion. But that doesn't mean it isn't serious."

"Maybe he should have a good night's sleep. Then we'll see how he feels in the morning."

"That's been known to cure such cases." Rabbi Glenman finished with his inspection of Gary's head. "Go home and hit the sack, son. And don't go to work tomorrow. I guess Steadman and Company can get along without an office manager for one day."

Gary blinked. "How did you know—"

"And if you hear any voices after you wake up, come and see me. You know where the synagogue is?"

"I can find it."

After Gary left, Father Carney said, "You didn't answer the boy."

"He didn't ask me anything."

"Oh yes he did. He wanted to know how you knew—"

"Where he worked?"

"Where he worked."

Rabbi Glenman grinned at his friend. "My religion's a lot older than yours, so naturally I have to be smarter than you are. Let's finish the game."

* * *

GARY didn't go directly home. He would have been much bet-

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ter off if he had, but he felt the need of a cup of coffee and stopped in at a lunch room a few blocks from Father Carney's church.

It was there that he first set eyes on the two men who were to complicate his life. Gary ordered coffee, and first noticed the men when a gruff voice announced:

"It'll be a pushover."

Gary looked up as one of the men said to his companion. "They call this hamburger. It should be for the garbage can."

The other man glowered at the waiter. "Hey bud—you expect us to pay for this?"

The waiter was not to be intimidated. "You ordered it didn't you?"

"None of your lip, bud! I'll—"

"Take it easy, Slim. He just serves what they give him. Besides we don't want no trouble."

The one called Slim seemed to remember something and sat back on his stool.

"I hope to hell Tiny don't get drunk or get cold feet. He's the best damn soup man in the business."

Slim glanced down toward Gary. "Shove up the salt, will you bud?"

"Certainly."

"This time tomorrow we'll have a hunnert grand if things go right. Wonder why nobody's knocked over that Ace Building and Loan before. The damn thing's a cheese box."

Slim turned to his friend. "You think Tiny's going to be all right, Mac? I'll bet he's out plastered someplace right now."

Mac said, "That's okay with me. Just so he's sober by nine bells tomorrow night."

"I guess you're right."

"Wish we could get somebody besides Tiny. He's plain unreliable. But there just ain't no other good soup men in town."

Gary's coffee scalded his throat. He coughed and grabbed for a napkin. Slim favored him with a look of sympathy. "Rotten stuff, eh bud? It'd choke an elephant. Maybe somebody ought to sue this joint."

"A hundred grand. The big haul. Then I'll go straight."

Gary clawed a dime from his pocket and threw it on the counter. "It was just too hot," he said, and fled from the lunchroom, slamming the door behind him.

He was in a panic now. Things weren't getting better. They were getting worse. He smashed the heel of his hand against his temple in a frantic effort to dislodge whatever it was that played records in his brain. But the blow disturbed the swollen nerves of his bump and brought such screaming pain that he felt suddenly faint. He reeled drunkenly for a few steps.

Home and bed. That was it. When a man got into bed he stayed out of trouble. Half an hour later, Gary swallowed five aspirin and crawled in between the sheets. He lay for a long time staring up at the dark ceiling. Then the pain in his head subsided into a dull ache and he found sleep.

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HE awoke with a start the following morning and a thought lay waiting in his mind. Maybe I'm all right now. Maybe a night's sleep brought back my sanity.

He tested the lump on his skull gingerly and found it wasn't nearly so bad as it had been. And the headache was gone too. Outside the rain had stopped and the sun was shining. Gary stretched luxuriously. Everything was going to be all right.

While Gary dressed, he could smell the bacon frying downstairs. It whetted his appetite. He knotted his tie and remembered the lunchroom of the night before. He grinned. Funny he'd hear voices about a plan to rob a bank. Must have been his evil nature asserting itself. He'd heard it said that a man in a delirium always speaks out according to his true nature. That's what he had been in—a sort of delirium. He pulled the knot of his tie into place and went down to breakfast.

No one was there but old Mr. Kurtz who always kept his nose in the paper and hadn't spoken a word at breakfast for five years. Gary sat down and Mrs. Larkin called from the kitchen, "That you Gary?"

"Right."

"How many eggs do you want?"

"What does that matter? I never get more than two."

"Two eggs are enough for anybody. They cost money."

Gary found a section of paper and checked the box scores while his eggs were frying. A few moments later Mrs. Larkin brought them in.

"Good morning Gary."

"Good morning to you, sweetheart."

"My-my! Are we peppy this morning."

"These eggs are about four hours from going rotten but they're cheaper than fresh ones and nobody's complained yet."

A chill ran down Gary's body. He turned a white face on his landlady. "What did you say?"

"I said my-my are we peppy this morning. That sweetheart business."

"No—after that."

"After that what?"

"What did you say after you said that?"

"I didn't say anything." Mrs. Larkin set the plate before Gary. She frowned. "Maybe you ought to see somebody about your ears, Gary. You're awfully jumpy."

Gary got up from his chair.

"Aren't you going to eat your breakfast?"

"No—no. I'm not hungry?"

"Something wrong with the eggs?" There was discernable worry in Mrs. Larkin's voice.

"No. They look like fine eggs. It's just that I remembered an appointment."

Mrs. Larkin—who felt a good offense was the best defense—said. "They certainly are. The best money can buy!"

These were the last words Gary

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heard as he rushed out the front door.

* * *

RABBI Glenman had a cup of coffee on his desk. He sipped it while studying Gary with keen eyes. Gary was pacing up and down and Glenman had to keep turning his head to follow him.

"Sit down, son," the balding rabbi said. "You make me feel like I'm at a tennis match."

Gary dropped into a chair.

"So the trouble didn't correct itself overnight?"

"No. Last night I heard voices planning to rob a bank. And this morning when I was at breakfast a voice said the eggs would be rotten in four hours but that they were cheaper than fresh ones."

"At least the voice was logical."

Gary leaned forward in sudden desperation. "Please don't make fun of me, Rabbi. It's serious. I'm going mad!"

Glenman smiled. Then, as though taking his turn, he got up and began pacing the floor. "I'm not making fun of you, son. But I'd like to see you relax a little. And if it's any comfort, I can tell you that you aren't going mad."

"But the voices!"

"They're real. So far as you're concerned, that is."

"But people who hear voices are insane. They're put into an asylum."

"You've got that twisted a little. People go into asylums because they're insane—of course—but not because they hear voices. They go insane *after* they hear the voices because their minds aren't strong enough to stand up under the shock of it."

"I'm—I'm afraid I don't understand you."

Rabbi Glenman pulled a chair close to Gary and sat down facing him. "Let me explain. Did you ever hear of mental telepathy?"

"Yes. It has something to do with reading minds. It's done in vaudeville."

"Don't let that confuse you. In vaudeville it's usually a fake. There are several forms of mental telepathy. Yours no doubt came from the whack on the head you got last night when you fell down."

There was fright in Gary's eyes. "You mean something happened to my brain?"

"After a manner of speaking. The human brain is a delicate thing. Even specialists don't know too much about it. As a result of your accident you've somehow become sensative to thought waves. They are picked up and interpreted in your brain. And they probably aren't voices at all. They just seem to be because that's the only thought-interpretation your conscious mind is capable of."

Gary stared at the churchman in complete bewilderment. "Then it *was* the little man—and the girl in red—and those two men were planning to rob a bank!"

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Glenman regarded Gary pensively during a minute of complete silence. "No doubt. And now you've got to have some coaching. You've stepped into a new world—a world inhabited by comparatively few people, and you've got to learn how to conduct yourself."

Gary was half out of his chair. "We've got to tell the police—those men—"

"We'll do nothing of the kind," Glenman said sharply. "Sit down."

Gary dropped back without protest, but his eyes were filled with question and accusation.

"If you fly off half-cocked, you're going to get into trouble and maybe you *will* land in the nuthouse. Now take it easy and let me explain."

"But those men—"

Glenman waved him to silence. "Let me put it this way. Suppose, when I played football in college, I went into a game with a baseball bat—and nobody else in the game had one. That would give me an unfair advantage, wouldn't it?"

"But they wouldn't let you—"

Glenman frowned with impatience. "All right, suppose the baseball bat wasn't visible. The officials couldn't see it. It would still be unfair, wouldn't it?"

"Yes—yes—I guess so."

"You don't guess so—you know so. And here's another angle. The Catholic Church has a rite called confession in which you confess your sins to your priest. This knowledge of your secret deeds and thoughts gives the priest an advantage over you, but he'd die under torture before he'd reveal them to anyone, because his role of confessor is a sacred trust."

"That's true."

"And it goes even further. If a man came to Father Carney and told him in the confessional that he intended to go out and murder another man, Father Carney could do nothing about it except try to dissuade the would-be murderer. Isn't that also true?"

Gary nodded.

"All right. In seeking out the reason why Father Carney couldn't act to protect the victim's life other than through influence upon the person confessing, we'll ignore church law and get down to basics. It amounts to this: Under the laws of God or nature or whatever you want to call them, no man is justified in using superior weapons on another man. That makes it an unfair fight and God hates such things. That you can depend on."

Glenman reached over and picked up his coffee cup. "Now maybe you have some inkling of how you'll have to conduct yourself."

Gary sat frowning at the floor. After a time, he shook his head. "I don't get it exactly. Those two men plan to rob a building and loan association tonight."

Rabbi Glenman shrugged. "Let them rob it. Maybe they'll get caught and go to jail."

"But suppose I'd heard them dis-

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cussing it—heard their actual words instead of their thoughts?"

"That would be a different matter. You wouldn't be using your baseball bat. You'd be using weapons they also possess and it would be a fair fight. If they were stupid enough to let an outsider hear their plans they'd deserve to be tripped up."

"Then I just let them go ahead?"

"Of course. It's none of your business. Just as the thoughts of the girl in the bus were none of your business. It wasn't your fault that you heard them but if you tried in any way to take advantage of them you'd be stained with a guilt you could never erase."

There fell a period of silence after which Rabbi Glenman said, "Maybe you'd like to talk it over with Father Carney although I don't advise it."

"Why not?"

"That's a little hard to explain. Frankly I think it would be a new problem to him. With me it's—different."

"You mean you've had contact with other people who had the power to hear thoughts?"

"Yes. And the advice I'm giving you comes partly from experience. It's necessary to look at these things from a practical standpoint. You've got to figure out how to keep yourself out of trouble. Noble instincts are all very well but basic principals are even more important. You have to start with the certainty that the good Lord doesn't expect you, or any group you belong to, to put the world on its feet and punish all the wrongdoers. Then you go on from there."

After a while Gary got up to leave. They shook hands and Rabbi Glenman said. "Drop in and see me any time." He made a playful pass at Gary's chin. "And keep your nose clean. You've developed a third ear, son. Don't let it get you into trouble."

* * *

ONCE you understood the mechanics of the thing, it was exhilarating to walk down the street and hear people think. Gary didn't go to work that day. He wandered around the town following this person and that. It was amazing, the strange things that went on in people's minds.

"She's a swell kid. I'd give her five years of my life but I can't give her no fur coat. Maybe if I told her I was going to but it wouldn't be along for a while, she'd loosen up and—"

"It would be nice to poison him. I wonder if I'd have the nerve to go through with it? There's that rat poison that's been lying in the cellar for years. Maybe I could put it in some rhubarb. They say rhubarb is poisonous sometimes without anything in it."

"Why can't I open my pay envelope and have a couple of beers on the way home? I'm the guy that

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works for it—not her. How come she thinks she's got a right to take all my dough and only give me lunch money? Maybe I could open the bottom and take out a buck and seal it up again. I'll tell her I got a cut. Aw hell! Maybe I better go home. There's beer in the ice box."

"So I'll be late. So what? I'll tell Fishface to go peddle his—"

Exhilarating at first, but sometimes embarrassing. As with the blonde girl who looked at Gary and thought, *"I'll bet you've got bow legs and—"*

And finally boring. Also an eventual uneasiness overtook Gary and sent his spirits tumbling. It wasn't until he discovered himself standing in front of a brick structure marked, Ace Building and Loan Association, that he realized his uneasiness came mainly from a guilty conscience.

Inside there were clerks and executives—good, sincere people, busy guarding, investing, and augmenting the funds of other good, honest, sincere people.

And tonight they were going to be robbed by some no-good hoodlums who went on the theory that only saps work; who would take the hard earned money of honest citizens and sneer at them for being so stupid as to work and save it.

Gary scowled at the building, then turned and walked slowly down the street. Rabbi Glenman was right of course. God hadn't appointed Gary to police the world. Experienced men were hired for that sort of thing. It was their job, not his.

Gary went into a restaurant; was intrigued, then bored with the waitress' thoughts. He ordered liver and onions; ate half of it and paid his check. He began walking again.

He wondered what a soup man was; then decided it was a person experienced with nitro-glycerine. He'd heard the term used in a grade-B movie once. He wondered about Tiny. Maybe Tiny would get drunk and stay that way. They couldn't rob the Ace Building and Loan with their soup man drunk in some bar.

This thought cheered Gary for a while; until he realized they'd probably sober Tiny up and do the job later. He saw six men in blue uniforms marching out of a building. He let them pass, looked up and saw what was written over the door of the building: Summerdale District Police Station. He hurried on, covered a half a block. Then he stopped and turned slowly around.

* * *

"I want to report a robbery." Sergeant Larry O'Hara was on the desk at Summerdale. He was a big red faced man whose job had taken a basically sweet nature and had hardened it into something akin to sheet metal. He looked up from the blotter on which he'd been writing and said, "That so? What'd they clip you for?"

"Not me, officer. I wasn't robbed. The robbery hasn't taken place

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yet."

"What is this—a rib? If Sol Friedman sent you in here to give me the needle—"

"You don't understand. Nobody sent me. My name is Gary Mason. I know about a robbery that's going to occur. I want to tell you about it so it can be prevented."

Larry O'Hara squinted through small black eyes. "Oh, a little bird, huh? Out of Friedman's pigeon loft?"

Gary's bewilderment was apparent. And with it came some resentment. "See here. I'm trying to be a conscientious citizen. I happen to have some information the police should be happy to get. I resent this treatment. Do you want me to tell you about this robbery or don't you?"

"Oh by all means. You just spill your guts all over the room and then we'll scoot out and apprehend the coolprits."

"The crime will occur—"

"Wait a minute."

O'Hara picked up the phone and barked, "Friedman around?" He put the phone down and ignored Gary, worked again on the blotter.

A few minutes passed, after which a thin, sad-eyed man came into the room picking his prominent teeth with a gold pick. "What's the gripe, O'Hara?"

O'Hara looked up at Gary—then nodded toward the thin man. "This is Friedman of the Robbery Detail."

Friedman went on picking his teeth. His regard for Gary was neither warm nor cold. It was markedly impersonal. "What's the gripe, neighbor?"

"It's no gripe. I just have information about a robbery. I'm trying to tell somebody."

"Got braced huh? What'd they clip you for?"

Gary became a trifle exasperated. "That's what he asked me. I—"

"Whyn't you tell him?"

"It's a robbery yet to occur. I want to give somebody the details."

"Okay. Go ahead and give."

"It will take place at nine o'clock tonight. That is if Tiny is sober."

"Who's this Tiny?"

"A soup man."

"What's he do—work in a restaurant?"

"No. That is I don't think so. A soup man handles nitroglycerin. Didn't you know that?"

Friedman looked mildly at O'Hara. "Uh-uh. I thought it was something you et. What happened? You get sore at the gang?"

"What do you mean?"

O'Hara scowled. "He means why are you here spilling your guts, stupid! Talk up!"

"I'm not a member of the gang!"

"What'd you do—resign?"

"Now look here! Tonight at nine o'clock Slim and Tiny and—and another man will rob the Ace Building and Loan Association!"

"Who's the other guy?" Friedman wanted to know.

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"I don't remember his name."

O'Hara said, "He's the one you're scared of, huh?"

"I'm not scared of anybody! I'm just doing my duty as a citizen!"

The officers ignored Gary with a sufferance of long practice. Friedman sighed. "I guess we better look into it. You never can tell which ones are for the birds and which aren't."

O'Hara regarded Gary with some hostility. "Where's you get this information?"

"I—" Gary hesitated, gulped. "I can't tell you that."

"Okay," Friedman said. "We'll check."

"That's fine," Gary said with relief. "In case you want me, you'll find me at my home. The address is—"

Friedman laid a gentle hand on his shoulder. "No, neighbor. If we want you we'll find you at our home. The address is here. Come on."

"Wait a minute! You can't arrest me."

"I'm not arresting you. I'm just parking you in a cell."

"But you have no legal authority."

Friedman shrugged. "We'll find some. Material witness. Loitering in a police station. Come on."

* * *

GARY paced the floor of his cell for a long time. Then he grasped the bars and yelled, "Let me out of here. I want to see my lawyer. I want to see Father Carney. I want to see Rabbi Glenman!"

Then Gary remembered all the grade-B movies he'd seen in which the criminal grasped the cell bars and demanded to see people. This made him self conscious so he sat down on the cot and stared at the wall. He heard a voice.

"They ain't got a thing on me. I wasn't nowhere near that jewelry store. I was at Tony's bar. I found the bracelet in the street and they can't prove different. I got nothing to worry about."

Gary looked across the corridor and saw a sullen mouthed thug in the opposite cell. Gary said, "Quit talking!"

"I didn't say nothing."

"Then quit thinking. You bother me."

The thug said, "Huh! One for the padded cells," and lay down and went to sleep.

Quite a while later they took Gary out of his cell and into a room where there was a very strong light. They made Gary sit where the light shone into his eyes and he couldn't see either O'Hara or Friedman. But he could hear them.

"We got your gang flat-footed."

"This is outrageous! They aren't my gang. I only saw them once. In a restaurant. Was Tiny drunk?"

"Uh-uh. He was sharp as a dollar. So you just met them once and they told you all about their caper."

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"I—I heard them talking about it. I tried to be a good citizen."

"We like good citizens, but we're curious. We want to know more. Especially because these cookies aren't the kind that talk over their capers with a total stranger. We've got a hunch you aren't a total stranger. We just want to know more."

"There's no more to tell. I didn't hear them talking exactly. I—I kind of read their minds."

"Oh, a mind reader. See? We're learning things. And we figure a good man like you maybe should have protection. We've got lots of protection around here. What if these coots get the word out to their friends that you read their mail and they—"

"Not their mail—their minds!"

"—their minds and decide to do something about it. Maybe they'd hand you your head some night. We just want to know more, neighbor."

"There's nothing more I can tell you."

"Oh yes there is. You're going to tell us a lot more. For instance—"

Friedman stopped speaking as a door opened. Then Gary heard O'Hara speak with some deference. He had never heard O'Hara speak with deference before. It was a novelty. O'Hara said, "Good evening Father Carney. What brings you here?"

Gary heard another voice. That of Rabbi Glenman. "Turn that light off, Friedman. You're wasting electricity."

The strong light was snapped off.

Father Carney regarded Gary with troubled eyes. Father Carney and Rabbi Glenman regarded each other. Then Rabbi Glenman regarded Friedman and Father Carney regarded O'Hara. Then each churchman took an officer by the lapel and went to far ends of the room. There were whispers from both ends—whispers Gary couldn't catch. He could catch nothing until he heard O'Hara say, "Yes, Father. That's all right, Father. Yes, Father." And heard Friedman say, "Okay Rabbi. Everything's all right. Okay—okay."

In no time, Gary was out in the street walking between his two friends.

* * *

RABBI Glenman said, "There's a way that might work. It would have a very good chance of working in this case."

"Then whatever it is," Father O'Hara said, "for heaven's sake do it. We can't have this boy—"

He was interrupted by the sharp crack of a fist meeting a jaw. Then Rabbi Glenman was rubbing his knuckles and Gary was stretched on the floor. "Get some water," Glenman said.

Fifteen minutes later, the rabbi smiled. "It's all over. He's back to normal." Gary stared at Glenman

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with glazed eyes. Father O'Hara said, "How do you know it's over?"

"Because I just thought at him, very clearly. He didn't get a bit of it."

Father O'Hara's eyes widened. "Oh. So you're one of them too!"

Rabbi Glenman grinned. "I've been a telepath since I was born. That's why I could help the boy."

Father Carney was scowling. "Ah-ha! A great light dawns. I understand a lot of things now. When you played football they used to talk about your uncanny ability to forecast the opponent's next play—"

Rabbi Glenman scowled too but there was a twinkle deep in his eyes. "A telepath never takes advantage of—"

"—of a poor priest over a chess table? Why you—"

"Never," Glenman said solemnly, "under any circumstances."

"Can I go home now?" Gary asked weakly.

THE END

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The Story Of
Science Fiction's Editors

By James V. Taurasi

The inside facts about the editors of the science fiction field, by the editor of *Fantasy-Times*, world famous fan newsmag.

SCIENCE-FICTION editors are a queer breed of people. They could originally have been editors of the swellest slicks in the publishing field (and some of them were) but let one of them edit a science-fiction magazine, and thereafter he calls himself nothing but a science-fiction editor and fan. The other magazines he edited no longer count. All he'll talk about is the scientifiction magazine he's editing or has edited. With *no* exception, they're all like that.

It all began in 1926, when the "papa" of the pulp scientification magazines, *Hugo Gernsback*, decided to put out a magazine devoted exclusively to science-fiction stories. He had been publishing science-fiction in all his magazines for years. About the best of these were the stf serials in his *Science and Adventure*, a magazine similar to *Popular Science* of today. He had even tried an all "Science-Fiction" edition of that magazine with great success. Hugo Gernsback has been a science-fiction fan from his early childhood; he coined the term "science-fiction" to describe his favorite brand of scientific literature. In fact he also coined the word "scientifiction" from which we get the abbreviation "STF". His first all-stf magazine was to have been called *Scientifiction*, but afraid that it would scare away readers who would misunderstand what it contained, the name *Amazing Stories* was finally decided on and *Amazing Stories* it was, the first in the field.

Sam Moskowitz in his "Immortal Storm" (the history of fandom) summed up the work of Gernsback when he stated: "Hugo Gernsback did something for the science fiction fans that had never been attempted before; he gave them self-respect. He preached that those who followed this sort of reading matter avidly were not possessed of a queer taste, but actually represented a higher-than-average type of intel-

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lect. And he tried to lay down rules for science fiction. Primary among these were plausibility: nothing was to appear in the stories he published that could not be given a logical scientific explanation." (Quoted from *Fantasy Commentator,* Fall, 1945.)

Hugo Gernsback left *Amazing Stories* in 1929 and soon after started another quartette of stf magazines. This time he called them, *Science Wonder Stories, Air Wonder Stories* (which combined a year later into *Wonder Stories* and is still being published today as *Thrilling Wonder Stories*), *Scientific Dectective* and *Wonder Stories Quarterly.* He edited and published *Wonder Stories* until 1936 when he sold it to Standard Magazines, Inc.

While publishing *Wonder Stories,* Gernsback gave the then budding science fiction fandom a much needed shot in the arm by forming the "Science Fiction League" to which many fans credit the foundation of modern fandom. Again we turn to Moskowitz's "Immortal Storm" for a summation. In Part 2, Chapter 8 of this history, Sam stated: "Looking back from the vantage of a decade's perspective, we are forced in fact to admit that the Science Fiction League was more beneficial and important to fandom than any organization which preceded or followed it. Not only did it actually create the fan field as we know the latter today, but it gave the field something that it had never possessed before: a realization of its own existance." (Quoted from *Fantasy Commentator,* Winter 1945-46.)

Thus, Hugo Gernsback is not only the father of the science-fiction magazine, but the god-father of science fiction fandom as well.

Many volumes could be written about Hugo Gernsback, the man but it would be best to let his good friend, the popular author, Dr. David H. Keller, who knew Gernsback personally when he was at the height of his stf publishing, tell you about him.

Writing on Gernsback in the 100th issue of *Fantasy-Times,* Keller stated: "When I first met Gernsback in New York he impressed me as a polished cosmopolitan rather than the usual chauvanistic American. Tall, brunette, energetic, he seemed, in spite of quiet mannerisms, to have a boundless reservoir of energy to be used in editorial or financial emergencies. He always took home with him a brief case filled with manuscripts which he read in bed between the hours of 11 P.M. and 2 A.M. He rarely allowed social engagements to interfere with his editorial work. He was a genial host; in his moments of relaxation told interesting tales of his boyhood in Europe. At the age of 14 he wired a convent in Luxemburg, his home city, so that the Mother Superior could ring for her subordinates when she desired their presence. This convent was closed to men and it was necessary to secure Papal Dis-

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pensation to enter and install the electrical system."

Gernsback has only attended *one* meeting of any science fiction fan club in the world. His one appearance was at the March 1950 meeting of "The Eastern Science Fiction Association." Here he stated that he gave up science-fiction publishing because he could no longer get the kind of stories he wanted. He admitted that he knew nearly nothing of modern stf., and confessed that he hardly recognized it as the same species of story.

Gernsback is now in his mid-sixties and is still an editor and publisher. He publishes *Radio-Electronics*, the leader in its field. Last year his famous book "Ralph 124C-41 plus", was reissued, and this year it will appear in England as a pocket book.

Under Gernsback, as managing editor, was *Dr. T. O'Conor Sloane, Ph.D.*, who stayed on with the magazine *Amazing Stories*, after Gernsback left it in 1929 and later became full editor until the magazine was sold to Ziff-Davis in 1938. Dr. Sloane was a picture of the ideal scientist. Tall, slim and with along white beard, he looked the part fans associated with stf editors. He also has the honor of being the oldest man ever to edit a stf magazine. Born on November 24, 1851, he was 87 when he left *Amazing*. He passed away in the early 1940s, having reached the age of 90 plus. Although he accepted and published many excellent interplanetary stories, he was of the opinion that man would never conquer space and would never reach the moon.

F. Orlin Tremaine is the editor who really knocked the whole stf publishing field for a loop. He was the Editor of Street and Smith assigned to run *Astounding* when they purchased it in 1933. Tremaine soon had the magazine on the top of the heap. Here's what Moskowitz says about him. Once more we quote from "The Immortal Storm:" "When Clayton Publications was sold to Street & Smith in 1933, *Astounding Stories* reappeared after a six month hiatus under the editorship of F. Orlin Tremaine whose reputation at that time was at its all-time high. A science fiction fan himself, Tremaine managed within two years time to rocket *Astounding* to the leading position among fantasy pulps, printing such high quality of popular fiction that his two competitors were almost forced out of the running." (Quoted from Fantasy Commentator, Spring 1949.)

In fact it was only a few years later that both competitors were sold. *Wonder* in 1936 and *Amazing* in 1938.

Tremaine became editorial director in 1937 and appointed the popular author John Campbell, Jr., to the position of editor for *Astounding*, a position he still holds today.

Tremaine soon left Street & Smith and has since done numerous editorial and publishing assignments.

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He had his own book publishing company for awhile and has since been editor of numerous magazines. He is an author in his own right with numerous stf and detective stories under his belt.

He proved he was still a good stf editor, by publishing the stf magazine *Comet*, in the early 1940s. Though it published only five issues and was greatly handicapped by a company that could only pay the lowest of rates and employed a poor quality printer, *Comet* came close to becoming the king of the then published stf magazines before the company went bankrupt and the magazine folded. Had he had a better company to publish it; Tremaine would have made *Comet* the leading stf mag.

Tall and slim, Tremaine has always been interested in stf fandom, attended numerous club meetings and conventions. Today he is an active member of "The Fantasy Veterans Association" (having served in the US Army in World War I) and is presently book editor of the magazine *Check*.

Charles Hornig was the subject of a fan editor's dream, when he obtained the position of managing editor of *Wonder Stories*, under Gernsback, in the early 30s.

Hugo Gernsback needed an editor for his stf magazine. On his desk was the first issue of a fan magazine, *The Fantasy Fan*, edited by 17-year-old Hornig. Gernsback looked it over and quickly appointed Charlie as managing editor of *Wonder Stories*. Hornig left the magazine only when it was sold to Standard. Not long after that he became editor of three new stf magazines for Columbia Publications, *Science Fiction*, *Future Fiction* and *Science Fiction Quarterly*. Hornig is about medium height, black haired and has always been a science-fiction fan. Today he's living on the west coast, where he moved after giving up his magazines in 1941 to another very active fan, *Robert W. Lowndes*.

Lowndes was a most active fan in the late 30s. A publisher of numerous fan mags, at one time he even published a weekly fan-news mag. He had sold numerous stf stories and some very high quality fantasy poetry prior to taking over the three stf magazines of Columbia Publications. In those days his fan friends called him "Doc" Lowndes. His first step was the combining of *Science Fiction* and *Future* into one magazine. Lowndes continued to edit the magazines until World War II's paper shortage forced them to fold. But, not long after the war ended, up they came again, with Lowndes still at the helm. Today they are titled, *"Future Combined With Science Fiction Stories* and *Science Fiction Quarterly*. Though the stf mags were not published during the war, Lowndes stayed on with Columbia, editing their detective and western magazines.

When Standard bought *Wonder Stories* and renamed it *Thrilling*

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Wonder Stories, they had a man on their editorial staff just made for the magazine, *Mort Weisinger.* Weisinger was one of the early group of fans, including Ray Palmer, Julius Schwartz, and Forrest J. Ackerman, who published the legendary fan mag, *Fantasy Magazine.* Mort had had a few stories sold and wanted nothing more than to edit an stf magazine. He was given the assignment and carried on until he left in 1941 for an editorial position with the *Superman* comic magazine group. But this didn't end his stf editing career. Today, with Julius Schwartz, he co-edits two stf comic magazines, *Strange Adventures* and *Mystery In Space,* produced by the publisher of *Superman.*

Oscar J. Friend ran *Thrilling Wonder Stories* and *Startling Stories,* (started under the editorship of Mort Weisinger), from 1941 until 1945, when *Sam Merwin Jr.,* took them over.

Sam took over a tough job when *TWS* and *Startling* were handed to him. They were in a sad, sad state. Though Merwin didn't know too much about science-fiction, he is a darn good editor and knows a good story when he sees one. Slowly he built the mags up until when he left them only a few months ago, they were (and are) among the best of their types. Sam is a big man, about six-foot, heavily built and with an extra strong sense of humor. He left the Standard mags to free lance in writing science-fiction and other types of stories. I had the pleasure of meeting his teen-age son at Steve Takacs' book shop only recently and inquired what his "pop" was doing. Young Merwin assured me his father was hard at work on a stf novel.

Merwin leaves his stf magazines in good hands—in the hands of his silent partner, *Sam Mines,* who will carry on the policies of Merwin and add some of his own. Mines is an old-time stf fan. He started reading our favorite brand of literature during the early days of Gernsback, got sidetracked into westerns when he started writing, but now he's with his old love, scientifiction. Merwin paid him the greatest compliment possible when at the 1st Fan-Vet Convention in New York, in April, he stated that Mines is the man who should have gotten the job of editing the Standard stf mags in the first place, "as he knows more about stf than I'll ever know."

Jerry Bixby is the young chap that edited among other magazines, *Jungle Stories* for Fiction House, but looked with loving eyes at their stf magazine, *Planet Stories.* When the then editor of *Planet* left, he was given the job, and went right to work modernizing and slicking up the "space-opera" special into what he thought it should be. He did such a good job that the magazine soon became a bi-monthly instead of a quarterly. Under his excellent editorship a new mag was born to Fiction House, *Two Complete Science-*

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Adventure Books. Bixby left the mags early in 1950 to try making a living writing and selling stf. But after four months of that, he is back to editing again, this time as assistant to Sam Mines at Standard. The fans will be glad to know that besides helping Sam pick and publish the stories, Jerry will do all the fan departments in the magazines, a field natural for him.

Known as the "Queen of the stf reprint magazine", *Mary Gnaedinger* has been the guiding light of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* since it first began under Munsey back in 1939. She is one of the few editors to continue editing a stf magazine even after it was sold to another company. Popular Publications took her along with the magazine when they bought out Munsey in 1942 and today she still is editor of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries.* She has also had the heartbreak to see one of her stf magazines, *Fantastic Novels,* born, die, be reborn, only to die again. But she has high hopes that perhaps soon *F. N.* will be reborn once more.

Ray Palmer was a fan at the very beginning of Fandom. Writing letters to *Amazing Stories* in the early days of the magazine, he never even gave thought to the fact that one day he would be editing it, but that he did. When Ziff-Davis took over *Amazing* in 1938, they appointed Ray Palmer, then a young writer of stf stories to fill the shoes of Sloane. This Ray did, first as managing editor and then as full editor, for 11 years, leaving only to publish his own stf magazine, *Other Worlds.* Under Ziff-Davis, Ray began a fantasy magazine, *Fantastic Adventures,* in which he tried to fulfill the fans' and his own dreams of large size, trimmed edges and drawings by the leading artists, but for some reason this didn't quite make the grade, and the mag was made into a pulp and as such continues today. Ray hit an unpopular time with the fans when he used the Shaver Mystery in *Amazing,* but after the Mystery had run its course and was removed from *Amazing,* and Palmer stated he would not use it in *Other Worlds,* the fans were quick to forgive and forget. When Ray injured himself a year ago, fandom sat on pins and needles waiting for the good news that he would recover. As editor of *Fantasy-Times* we received numerous letters asking how Ray was making out and hoping for some news that all would be well. Ray pulled through all right, but the fight is still not ended. Almost total paralysis is a tough nut to crack. About the best recommendation an editor can get in this field is from an other editor and this Ray recently received. Daniel Keyes wrote in a letter recently, "I feel that *Other Worlds* is a credit to the science-fiction field, and sincerely hope Mr. Palmer will keep up his very original and daring approach to s-f magazine editing."

A good share of the credit for

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Other Worlds' success should go to the managing editor, *Bea-Mahaffey,* an active science fiction fan, whom Palmer chose to aid him in putting out his mag. Wrote Palmer in the March 1950 issue of *Other Worlds,* "Incidentally, speaking of Bea Mahaffey, we caught sight of her at the Convention (7th World Science Fiction Convention), and decided she would be a valuable addition to our staff, so we induced her to come up to Evanston and take part in helping put together *Other Worlds.* She really knows science-fiction, and she'll add her talents to ours." Ray made a wise selection, for while he was paralyzed, Bea carried on quite skillfully to bring you *Other Worlds.* A true fan, Bea makes it her business to attend as many conventions as she can and brightens up the affair with her charming self.

Late in 1950, the science fiction field was uplifted by a new magazine, which sky-rocketed to the top in one issue. *H. L. Gold* was at the helm of the newcomer, *Galaxy Science Fiction.* Born in Montreal, Canada, in April 1914 and educated in New England and New York, Gold sold his first story in 1934 and has been an author, editor and publisher ever since. He has been on the editorial staff of *"Thrilling Wonder, Startling, Capt. Future* and *Strange Stories.* Has also edited detective magazines and comics. Has been the publisher of comic magazines, among them, *Green Lama Comics* and *Atoman Comics.* He served in the last war in the United States Army, part of the time in the Phillippines with the Combat Engineers, then after the war ended with the Armed Forces Radio Service. He, also, is a member of The Fantasy Veterans Association. Gold has had numerous stories anthologized in past collections and will have others in collections now being assembled. At present he's the capable editor of *Galaxy Science Fiction* and *Galaxy Novels.*

John W. Campbell followed Tremaine as editor of *Astounding Stories* and continued to keep it at the high level upon which Tremaine had placed it. His first change was to rename the publication *Astounding Science Fiction.* Now the *Astounding* part of the title has all but disappeared. Many fans are certain that Campbell would like to make it plain *Science Fiction,* if he could. Campbell was a very popular writer, one of the best, before he tied himself to an editorial chair, and many scientifiction experts believe the field lost one of its best authors when this happened. Campbell has always had a yen for editing a scientific magazine like *Scientific American,* but the closest he's been to this is when he took over *Air Trails* and changed the name to *Air Trail Science Frontiers* and included space travel items in it. But the readers of the magazine wanted only airplanes and soon Campbell was left with only *Astounding* under his control. Among his well-liked editing

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ventures was *Unknown*, still a much sought after mag. fans have asked time and time again to be revived. *Unknown* died via the paper shortages of the last war and though it looked like it might be revived after the war, to date it has not. A slight gleam of it was seen in 1948, when an annual *From Unknown Worlds* was published. To his credit it can be said that Campbell kept *Astounding* published monthly through the last war, the only stf mag to do so, and has kept the stories in the magazine on top level all through the years. Some fans greatly resent Campbell's dragging Hubbards' dianetics into *Astounding*. They feel that it has no place in a stf magazine. Currently, besides editing *Astounding*, Campbell is putting together an anthology of stories from his magazine to be published by Simon and Schuster early in 1952.

Howard Browne gave up Hollywood to take over *Amazing* and *Fantastic Adventures* when Ray Palmer left, and is still editor of them today. A science-fiction writer himself, he is doing a capable job with the magazines, and reports indicate that *Amazing* has the highest circulation of any stf magazine. Browne almost gave the science fiction world its first slick magazine of science fiction. It was close, plans were all drawn up, and the announcement made. All was ready to roll out the first issue, when the Reds decided to louse up things in Korea and the magazine had to be shelved. Who knows, perhaps, after this "baby war" is over, Browne will be the first editor to edit a stf slick magazine.

Before the War, Red-Circle caused a sensation by publishing *Marvel Science Stories*. That was in 1938. By 1941 the magazine had gone through numerous title changes and had seen its last issue. After the war, Red-Circle, now called Stadium Publishing Corporation, revived *Marvel Science Stories* as a quarterly. Though still a pulp, it now boasted trimmed edges. After two issues of this, it was decided to make the magazine a semi-slick digest size to really make it a top mag. This has proven a success and many fans rate it among the best, both in format, cover, interior illustrating and stories. While *Robert O. Erisman* has always been the boss on this mag, the editor is a young chap named, *Daniel Keyes*. 24 years old and a graduate of Brooklyn College, Dan spent two years in the Merchant Marine as Senior Purser, his spare time being spent in reading and writing science-fiction. Out of the Merchant Marine, he spent some time doing free-lance writing and has had numerous stories; western, sport and science-fiction, published under pseudonyms. He became editor of *Marvel* in August, 1950. He's read and enjoyed science-fiction ever since he was a boy and always felt that some day it would reach a larger audience than it did in those days. While working as an editor

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during the day, he's doing Post-Graduate work at night in Psychology.

Another young chap and an active fan in his day, is *Damon Knight*, assistant to *E. Jakobsson* on *Super Science Stories* until he became editor of his own excellent magazine, *Worlds Beyond*. Fate played him a dirty trick with *Worlds Beyond*, before the magazine had half a chance (the first issue was only on the stands 10 days) the publisher decided to drop it. But, in the three issues that did come out, readers of science fiction admit that it was good, and hope that some day the publishers will let Damon continue it. Knight started reading stf in 1933 with *Amazing* and soon discovered the others in the field and became a collector. "Discovered" fan magazines in 1939; Bob Tucker's *Le Zombie* being his first. He published two issues of a fan mag called *Snide*, the first on his own, the second with Bill Evans. Came to New York via the Denvention in 1941 and did some good illustrations for Bob Lowndes, Al Norton and others. His drawing style is very similar to Hannes Bok, but with a flavor all his own. Did a few stories and then drifted into editing. Now he's back to trying to make a living out of writing and from what we've read he should have no trouble. He's been a member of various fan clubs, among them, the FAPA, VAPA, The Futurians of New York and the Hydra Club. Was in a way responsible for the forming of The National Fantasy Fan Federation, through an article he wrote and Art Widner published under the title "Unite Or Die". We've just received word that he has moved to the west coast, from where he continues his successful career.

Speaking of *Super Science*, we can't forget to mention *Fred Pohl*, its first editor. Again we have a super active fan becoming an editor and writer. Fred was active in fandom almost from its very beginning and like many other fans, wrote many articles, published fan mags and organized fan clubs. When Popular decided to publish two stf mags, Fred Pohl took the job as editor and for quite a while edited *Super Science* and *Astonishing Stories* for them. *Alden H. Norton* took over from Pohl and edited them until, like many other stf mags, the paper shortage of war folded them. Today Fred Pohl is a successful Literary Agent specializing in science fiction and Norton is Assistant Publisher for Popular Publications.

Donald A. Wollheim was the most active fan on the East Coast in the early 30s. His collection of science fiction items is about the most complete in the world. Don wrote many, many articles and stories for the fan magazines in the early days, he was most active in organizing fan clubs and fan movements, and was the editor and publisher of many of the better fan mags of the day. His one

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issue of *Fanciful Tales* is still a most sought after article. He tried his hand at professional editing just before the war and edited two magazines, *Stirring Science Stories*, lasting four issues and *Cosmic Stories*, which lasted three issues. Again it was no bad editing that folded the magazines, but an unsound company. Before and during this brief editing position Don had sold a number of stories to various magazines. To Wollheim goes the honor of editing the first new magazine in the United States after the war. *The Avon Fantasy Reader*, under his leadership came out in early 1947 and is still being published today—and it was the first 35c stf magazine to see a newsstand. Last year, his company took a try at regular pulp magazines. *Out Of This World Adventure* and a little later *10 Story Fantasy*, both edited by Wollheim and we feel that company policies were too much. Both, and all other pulps tried by Avon, were suspended shortly after. But Wollheim came right back with a new pocket-sized reprint magazine, *Avon Science Fiction Reader*, which along with the older *Fantasy Reader* are on your newsstand today. Don is in his early 30s and is still mighty interested in fandom, tho his work keeps him almost out of it.

Before we go on with the American editors, let's take a look at England for a while. Way behind the US in science fiction magazines, it wasn't until 1937 that an active fan, *Walter Gillings* finally talked a publishing firm into putting out a science fiction magazine, and *Tales of Wonder* was born. From the first experimental issue it was a success and soon became a quarterly to continue until the War made paper almost impossible to obtain. After the war, Gillings was right back there with a magazine called *Fantasy*, which lasted but three issues. At about this time long active fan, *Ted Carnell* was also publishing a post-war stf mag called *New Worlds*, a title he had used before the war on a fan magazine. Three issues of this appeared and then the old dark cloud, paper shortage, ended it. But they were not to be denied. With the help of fandom, authors and other persons interested in stf a whole new company was formed and the title *New Worlds* was bought and soon in 1949 it reappeared as a quarterly. At this time Gillings was publishing an excellent fan mag, *Fantasy Review*, later changed to *Science Fantasy Review*. *New Worlds* made such a success that a new magazine with Gillings as editor was proposed by the cooperative company and in 1950 Gillings gave up his fan mag to put out the first issue of *Science Fantasy*. But he was to edit only two issues, as business and other matters took up his time and Ted Carnell took over the editorship of the magazine. Today *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy* are both edited by Ted Carnell. The first is a bi-monthly, the latter a

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quarterly. Ted, as well as Gillings is mighty active in Fandom. Carnell visited this country to attend the 1949 World Convention and proved to be as charming and interesting as his many letters.

Like Ray Palmer, *Bill Hamling* worked under Ziff-Davis, and like Ray, he too now owns and publishes his own science fiction magazine. The story goes like this: In his college days, Hamling edited the largest-circulation college paper in the country. In the early 40s he edited a semi-fan mag, *Stardust*. During the war he was a 2nd Lt. in the U.S. Army and then a job as managing editor, under Palmer of *Amazing* and *Fantastic Adventures*. Between and during all this he did some writing and turned out quite a few good stf yarns. When *Amazing* lost Palmer, Hamling stayed on working under Howard Browne. But when *Amazing* moved their editorial offices from Chicago to New York, Hamling decided to remain in Chicago and thus found himself without an editorial job. Ray Palmer had just issued a new magazine, *Imagination*. This he sold to Bill Hamling and Bill started issuing it with its 3rd issue. Semi-slick paper, tinted-colored photos and a format change were fast in following. Now we understand the magazine is going to be published more often. We never had the pleasure of meeting Hamling in person, but from his photo, we'd suggest that he cops the prize for the most handsome editor in the field. Like most editors who saw service in the US Armed Forces, Hamling is a member of the Fan-Vets.

Now we turn to an unusual magazine, *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. A magazine that is trying to do for science-fiction what *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* did for the detective field. This excellent mag is co-edited by *Anthony Boucher* and *J. Francis McComas*.

Anthony Boucher was born in Oakland, Calif., in 1911, educated at Pasadena High School, and the University of Southern Calif. Now lives in Berkeley, California while his mag is put together in New York. He's the author of seven published mystery novels (two under the pen-name of H. H. Holmes), and the editor of three anthologies. He's the founding director and 1951 National President of The Mystery Writers of America. Is Mystery editor of The New York Times Book Review; also science fiction reviewer (as H. H. Holmes) for the New York Herald-Tribune Book Review. Has been the author (principally with Denis Green) of several hundred radio scripts, especially Sherlock Holmes. He was the guest of honor of the Norwescon 1950; and the honorary chairman of the Westercon 1951.

Tony's co-editor, J. Francis McComas was born in Kansas City, Mo., in 1910. Educated "all the way from a Kansas City ward school, through a California one-teacher

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school", plus Berkeley Junior and Senior High Schools and the University of California. During the depression he worked as a time-keeper on the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge construction, as a radio announcer in Yuma, Arizona, as a radio actor in San Francisco and in the wholesale department of the Union Oil Company of California. Entered the book publishing business in 1941. Since that time has been associated with Simon & Schuster in various capacities, and is at present their regional sales manager on the Pacific Coast. Having worked as an editor, they occasionally listen to what he says about an author and/or a manuscript. Has written a number of stories and edited one anthology with Ray Healy.

Tho high cost of publishing a magazine and shortages of paper have cut down some science fiction magazines, still now and then you'll find a new one on the stands. Such is the case as you read this issue of *Other Worlds*. A new magazine called *If*, edited by one of *Amazing's* authors, *Paul W. Fairman*. You may not be too familiar with his work as most of his stories appear under pen-names. Its first issue contained stories by Howard Browne, Ray Palmer, Rog Phillips and Ted Sturgeon among others. All of whom we're sure you are quite familiar with.

That's it, most of them anyway. These are the guys and gals who put together the magazines you like to read. They are the persons who make science-fiction possible, the SCIENCE FICTION EDITORS!

And this issue of *Other Worlds* is proof they can write as well as edit!

The End

H. L. Gold, editor of the newcomer, **Galaxy**, which has taken one of the top places among stf mags.

For photographs of other editors mentioned in the preceding article, please turn to the 2nd, 3rd and 4th covers of this issue.

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GANDOLPHUS

By Anthony Boucher

Although history described him as a saint, it was Harrington's opinion he never existed — until the saint—if it was he—began to act like the Devil!

"IF there was a dectective's union," said my friend Fergus O'Breen, "I'd be out on my ear."

It was a good hook. I filled the steins again and got ready to listen.

"Remember that Compleat Werewolf business right here in Berkeley?" Fergus went on. "Or the time machine alibi in L.A.? You take now Dr. Fell or H. M. or Merlini; practically every case they get

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looks like it's supernatural or paranormal and they just plain know it isn't and start in solving it by 'How was this normally gimmicked?' Rules of the profession. Gentleman's agreement. Only to me things happen, and they don't fit."

"And what was it this time?" I asked. "A poltergeist? Or an authentic Martian invasion?"

Fergus shook his head. "It was . . . Gandolphus. And what Gandolphus was . . . Look: I'll tell you how I got dealt in. Then you can read the rest for yourself. I wangled a photostat of the damnedest document you ever read . . .

"It was when I was back in New York last year. Proving a Long Lost Heir was a phony—nice routine profitable job. So it's all polished off and I stick around Manhattan a couple of days just for kicks and I'm having dinner with friends when I meet this character Harrington. I won't describe him; he characterizes himself better than I could. So he learns I'm a private investigator; and just like people learn you're a writer, Tony, and give with their life histories, he drops his problem in my lap.

"It looks more like a police job to me, and I tell him so; and since I know Bill Zobel in his precinct I say I'll introduce him. He's all hot to get started, once he's got the idea; so we take a cab down and Bill thinks it's worth looking into and we all go over to Harrington's apartment in Sheridan Square.

"Now you've got to understand about Bill Zobel. He is—or was at this time I'm talking about—a damned good straight cop. Absolutely efficient, more intelligent than average . . . and human. Tough enough when he had to be, but no rough stuff for its own sake.

"Bill and I settle down in the livingroom to watch for whoever or whatever Gandolphus might be, and Harrington went into his study to type a full formal statement of the complaint he'd sketched to us. It was about two a.m. by now; and we were too tired for chess or cribbage even if we hadn't been kind of scared by the too damned beautiful boards and men Harrington offered us. So Bill Zobel switched on WQXR and we sat listening to music and Harrington's typing.

"The typing stopped at three. Nobody had come or gone, not even Gandolphus, through the one door of the study. At three fifteen we went in. Harrington was dead, and to me it looked natural."

Fergus stopped. "To date," I said flatly, "this is strictly no payment for good beer."

He reached for his briefcase. "At that point," he said, "I thought it was just about the most pointless evening I'd ever spent. Then, while we waited for the men from the Medical Examiner's office, Bill and I read what Harrington had been typing."

He handed me a sheaf of photostats. They were labeled *Statement*

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found in and beside typewriter of Charles Harrington, deceased.

* * *

MY name is Charles Harrington. I am 53 years of age, and a native American citizen. My residence is 13 Sheridan Square.

That is, I believe, the correct way to begin a statement? But the way from that point on leads through thornier brambles or, to shift the metaphor, through a maze in which the desideratum is to find, not the locus of egress, but the locus of entrance.

My name may not be unfamiliar to such as are interested in hagiography and iconography. My collection of Tenth Century objects of virtu relating to Christian devotional practises has made my apartment, I dare say, an irreligious Mecca to many; and hardly any one concerned with the variant vagaries of the mystic mind can be totally ignorant of the series of monographs which will some day form the definitive "life" of St. Gandolphus the Lesser. (I place the term *"life"* within quotation marks because the purpose of the book is to demonstrate the fact that the canonized gentleman never existed.)

The habits of a scholar should, perhaps, make easier the compilation of such a statement as this; but familiar though I may be with the miraculous in the Tenth Century, the . . . shall we say, unusual in the Twentieth is more disturbing.

Let us put it that the matter began a month ago, on Saturday, October the thirtieth. I was taking my conventional evening stroll, which had on this particular evening led me toward Washington Square. The weather was warm, you will recall; and you are doubtless familiar with Washington Square of a warm evening?

The mating proclivities of the human animal can flourish as well in autumn as in spring, if the thermometer be but auspicious; and Washington Square of such an evening is an unsettling spectacle to a man of voluntary celibacy. I had regretted my choice of locale and started to turn homeward when the thing flashed in my face.

It seemed, in fact, aimed directly at my eyes; and I knew a moment of terror, since sight has ever been to me by far the most rewarding of the senses. And although I dodged its direct impact, by swifter muscular response than I should have thought myself capable of (you will condone the informality of that construction), I felt a renewal of terror in the instant of the sudden blinding flash of its explosion.

The couples near me were too engrossed in other pursuits to pay any heed to me as I stood there trembling for what must have been a full minute. Only at the end of that time was I able to open my eyes, reassure myself that my sight was unimpaired, and observe upon the grass the

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shattered remains of what had so disproportionately terrified me. It was obvious from the fragments that the object had been a child's toy, modeled not upon the engines of my own childhood or the aeroplanes of my nephews,' but upon an interplanetary spaceship such as is employed by the hero of cartoon adventures named, I believe, Buck Ruxton.

That the child should make no attempt to reclaim his toy after so nearly serious an accident is understandable. It is possibly also understandable that I, after so severe a nervous shock, was forced in the course of the short journey home to stop in three successive drinking establishments and in each to consume a pony of brandy.

I relate all this in order to make clear why I, a normally abstemious if definitely not absentious man, retired that night with sufficient alcohol within me (I had added a fourth brandy upon my return to the apartment) to ensure an unusually, even abnormally sound sleep. It does not explain why I awoke next morning in most exquisite agony; but no hypothesis yet advanced has explained why, upon occasions, the mildest over-indulgence may produce more severe reactions than many a protracted debauch.

Only after the ingestion of such palliatives as aspirin, raw egg, tomato juice and coffee was I sufficiently conscious to become aware of what had happened in my apartment during my sleep.

To put it briefly and colloquially: Someone had drunk himself silly. Silly, indeed, he had been to start with; for indiscriminately he had emptied my cooking sherry and my Sandeman '07, my finest cognac and the blended rye which my younger nephew fancies. And all direct from the bottles: the dead soldiers stood all a row, but no glasses had been soiled.

As I assured you at the precinct station, no key save my own opens my door. Because of the value of my objects of virtue, even the superintendent and the cleaning woman are admitted only by appointment. The windows could be considered as entrances only by the most experienced "human fly."

I need not say, therefore, that I was sorely perplexed by the puzzle thus presented to me, nor that I wondered why a burglar, by whatever means he had procured admittance, should confine his attentions to my potable treasures when the apartment contains so many portable articles of value.

I took no action. My civic conscience is not readily aroused, and a police inquiry would disorder my life far more thoroughly than had the burglar. And the next occurrence, involving though it did those very articles of value neglected in the first instance, contained no element of interest to the police.

After a night of unusually heavy sleep occasioned by late work on

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Hagerstein's ridiculously inept thesis on St. Gandolphus, I awoke to find a light still burning faintly in this study. I entered, to discover that the gleam was that of a vigil light (Late Ninth Century) burning before my treasured Tenth Century image of Our Lady, Font of Piety. Upon the prie-dieu (Thirteenth Century, but betraying unquestionable Tenth Century influence), which normally stood across the room but now had been adjusted directly before the image, lay a Tenth Century illuminated breviary, open at the Office of the Blessed Virgin. Most startling fact of all, there was still visible upon the worn velvet of the prie-dieu the fresh and unmistakable imprint of human knees.

You will surely recall the legend (it is no more, as I have incontestably established) of the novice who fell asleep in the midst of copying a manuscript and awakened to find his task completed and the text illuminated far beyond his powers, with the minute signature woven into one of the initial letters: *Gandolphus*. There persists a handful of similar accounts of the unobserved and somewhat elfin post mortem activities of St. Gandolphus the Lesser; you will readily understand why the unseen fellow-tenant of my apartment was thenceforth, to me, Gandolphus.

But the contradictory nature of his activities puzzled me: one night of drunken orgy, one night of kneeling prayer. Nor was the puzzle closer to solution upon that morning on which I discovered in this typewriter an exquisite sonnet—so remarkable in its perfection that it has since been accepted for publication, under a pseudonym, by one of our better journals—signed (as though the invader could read my mind) with the name *Gandolphus*.

I shall pass rapidly over the embarrassing morning when I awakened with a curious pain in my back, to discover in the guestroom a fair-haired young woman who greeted me with the indecipherable remark, "Honey! . . . Hey! For a minute I thought you was him!", who proved to be the vendor of cigarettes at a nearby place of entertainment, and who departed abruptly and in a state of bewilderment conceivably exceeding my own.

Nor shall I linger over the disappearance of two thousand dollars in ten dollar bills, present in the apartment because a certain type of art dealer, I must confess, prefers transactions of this sort (fuller details, I assure you, would have no bearing upon this investigation); and the ecstasy of the more impoverished Italians in Bleeker Street over the vaguely described stranger who had pounded on shoody doors in dead of night to deliver handfuls of bills, each of the ten-dollar denomination.

I shall simply stress here the cumulative inconsistency of these proceedings: inebriety, religiosity, poet-

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ry, eroticism, philanthropy . . . an insane medley of the loftiest and basest experiences of which the human animal is capable.

It is this inconsistency which leads me unhesitatingly to reject the most apparently obvious "solution" of my mystery: that the fellow occupant of my apartment is no other than myself; that Box and Cox, Harrington and Gandolphus, are, in short, Jekyll and Hyde.

For whereas of his actions to date the inebriety and the concupiscence might be considered evidence of Hydean depravity, the sonnet and the alms-giving represent an exalted sublimation of which, I confess, the poor Jekyll in question is flatly incapable; and the religiosity, to my mind, fits into neither character. This is not I, nor yet another I. This is a being unknown to me, sharing the apartment to which only I have access, and indulging in actions which seems to me to have only this in common: that all represent singularly heightened forms of human experience.

This brings me to what I fear may well be the most overwhelming experience which Gandolphus has yet known, and the reason which has driven me, at whatever cost to the placidity of my own ordered existence, finally to lay this problem before a private detective and, upon his insistence, to communicate it to the police.

When I conveyed to you the nature of the incidents already here related, I found it hard to explain even to myself what "mental block" (if I may be permitted so jargonic a term) prevented me from communicating to you this evidence of the ultimate extremity of the quest of Gandolphus.

I refer, of course, to the kitchen knife which I discovered this morning still coated with blood which a private laboratory this afternoon assured me is human.

* * *

It is considerate of me, I think, to put those three asterisks there to denote the transition.

The knife, of course, is what alters the whole situation. That one bloody fact is sufficient to disrupt the tranquil *modus vivendi* which I believed that I had attained.

If you professional detectives, public and private, are as perceptive as, in rummaging around in this mind, I find some reason to believe you are, you will by now have realized many things. You will have understood, for instance, precisely what happened that Saturday night in Washington Square, and that the bright and exploding object was not a toy space ship.

You will even understand, perhaps, which word should have been underlined in that last sentence.

But I am not at all sorry that things should end as they now must. I have felt hampered here. It is not the ideal habitation in which to

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pursue my research. I was forced to realize that, in a somewhat comical but nonetheless vexatious manner, in the fourth of the episodes related above, and again to some extent in the sixth, that of the knife. There is also the matter of music, which I gather from reading to be one of the major human experiences; but these ears that I employ are tone deaf.

In short, I need a better vehicle. And just outside of this room—listening, as a matter of fact, to music at this moment—is (I find the phrase lying somewhere in a corner of this mind) metal more attractive.

There is no reason why I may not be frank. You will surely have gathered that it is imperative that I explore and realize every sensation of the inhabitants of this planet. Only through this experience can I convey to the ships that follow a proper scout's report on the symbiotic potential here. Every sensation which the host may undergo and force its symbiotic companion to share—*I must know what it is like.*

So I am turning off this machine, which has served its introductory purpose. But before I abandon it, I shall (curious how with practice it becomes possible to use them awake as well as asleep) use its fingers to type

Respectfully yours,
(I believe that is the proper subscription?),
GANDOLPHUS.

* * *

I TOOK my time about refilling the steins. The photostats deserved some thought. I was not particularly inclined to argue with Fergus' description of them as the damnedest document I'd ever read.

"I suppose," I ventured finally, "the knife did check—dimensions of blade, blood type and so on—with some known killing on the night in question?"

"It did," said Fergus. "An Italian peddler."

"And the knife had only Harrington's prints on it?"

"Of course."

"The pattern's clear enough. Obviously neurotic self-centered celibate entering the perilous fifties. Very self-revealing—pretty standard schizoid set-up, though I'll admit that wild episode of philanthropy is a new one on me. Harrington's death was natural, I suppose?"

Fergus grunted. "Syncope was the word the M. E. used. In English words, something turned off the machine."

"It's a good case," I admitted. "One of the odder build-ups to murder. But why on earth—"

"Why should it get me kicked out of the union? Because Bill Zobel dozed off."

I said "So?"

"It was late and it kept getting later at the station while they piled up all these facts about knives and syncopes. And finally Bill dozed off. He woke up when a patrolman came in yelling he'd picked up a hot sus-

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pect in a recent series of muggings. Nothing to do with the Harrington business; but the muggings were Bill's baby and he went off to question the suspect.

"The guy was guilty all right. Plenty of evidence turned up later. But he never came to trial. He died of the beating he got that night . . . from Bill Zobel, the tough straight cop who never stood for rough stuff. "It got hushed up; there was nobody to make a beef. But I was there; I saw the guy before the ambulance came. It was an artistic job; that night Gandolphus learned everything he needed to know about sadism—he hadn't tried that one yet; couldn't, maybe, with Harrington's body.

"Maybe you didn't hear out in the West about the rest of Zobel's career. The beating was bad enough. Then they began to watch him when they saw he was spending damned near his whole month's salary on concert and opera tickets. Precinct captains aren't exactly used to that in their men. The pay-off came when Zobel picked up a dope-peddler and went on a jag with the bastard's bindles.

"His record up to then was so clean they let him down easy and fixed a psychiatric discharge. Next month he got picked up once as a peeping Tom and once for inciting to riot in Union Square. Gandolphus wasn't missing a sensation."

"But you see," I interrupted, "we did hear about Zobel in the West." It was a fine rich feeling to have the topper for the first time in my years of knowing Fergus O'Breen. "We even met him. He was a guest speaker at a meeting of Mystery Writers of America. He told us, and damned frankly too, about the nervous breakdown he'd had last year and the psychiatric discharge and the course of treatments that led the police psychiatrist to recertify him finally. Lieutenant Zobel's a fine, normal man—I'd say a touch more so than anybody I notice in this room."

Fergus looked glum and disgruntled. "So you knew the topper," he said. "Yes, Bill's a normal man again. This time the machine wasn't turned off. Gandolphus just left. He'd found out what he needed. And like a good scout, he's gone back with his report on our symbiotic potential.

"Care to make a small bet as to what that report is?"

The End

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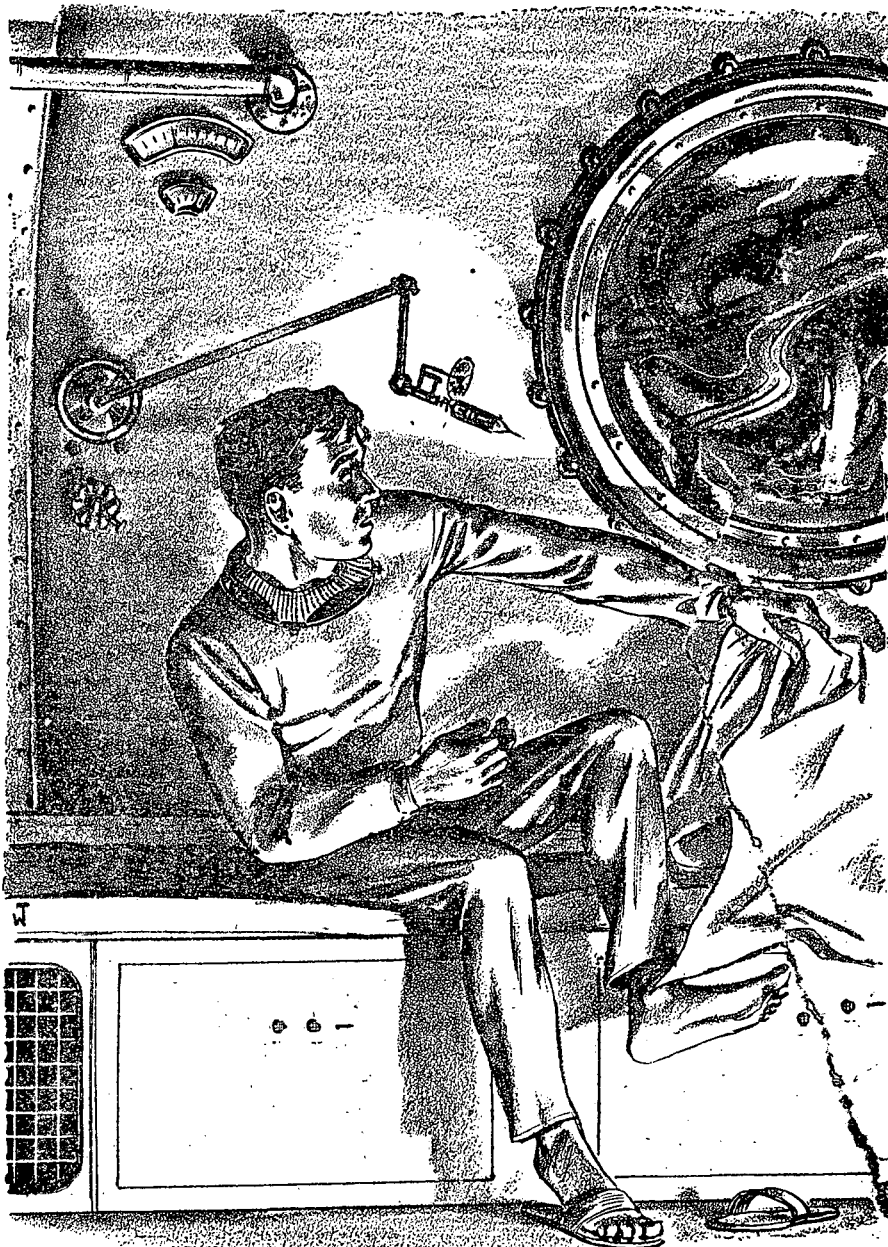

Illustration by Bill Terry

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NIGHTRIDE and SUNRISE

By

Jerome Bixby

Spacemen call it "the Spectre": what it really is, nobody knows—but long before Death comes aboard, you know he's coming.

TUESDAY 3:15 P.M., SHIPTIME.

I CAME out of it fast—I always do. After twelve years of constant use, *inerfite* doesn't leave much of a bang in its hangover. Even at that, though, my head felt like a baked potato; I waited until it settled down. Then I opened my eyes and blinked myself alive.

By my bunk, the port was writhing with colors: a thousand rainbows in combat, laced by the unnamed star-colors that are the coronet of hyperspace.

My gimmick—the autohypo, that is—came out of the wall again, scanned for me with its radar pinwheel, and made a determined pass at my arm. I dodged the needle, swung my feet off the bunk and into my sandals on the floor, yawning. The gimmick considered these movements, decided that I was awake, ergo its job done, and went back into its cubby and turned itself off.

I got up and reached at the dial-studded wallboard over my desk, pressing the button that activated every slamband in the *Starling*. A hundred needles spat *restorite* into a hundred wrists. A hundred people jerked and twitched up out of their drugged sleep, crew and passengers alike—I could tell because I could watch their metabolic processes scurrying toward normal on the wallboard dials—and most of them would immediately start to feel sicker than a goat in free fall.

I collected my kit, checked on myself in the mirror—my imagination saw another grey hair or two—and went out to ease the sufferings of the brood.

Fletcher's eternal post-switch nausea I squelched as usual with a piece of peppermint candy. His illness was largely psychosomatic, and I dreaded the day I'd have to report that Fletch was becoming too neurotic for hyper-space piloting. A good man, a fine one; but the responsibility was getting him—just as it gets them all. He grinned

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at me, and said: "Whatever this is, darling, it's wonderful stuff!" He sucked on the peppermint. I agreed with him. The human mind is also wonderful stuff.

I went the rounds of the operations rooms, handing out pills and taking pulses and peering into pupils. No more *restorite* needed here; these guys were all old-timers like myself.

In astrogation I came upon a green-faced kid.

"Hello," I said, "you're new this trip."

He started to salute—I do wear a colonel's stripe, God knows why, I certainly don't rank the captain—and I had to "at ease" him. His pupils were dilated, his pulse blurred and banging with tachycardia.

"You'd better go off duty for a while, son," I told him. "Go down to your cabin and read, maybe take a radiogen bath."

The clear call of Duty or Death, the old Academy foolishness, stiffened his back. He smiled and said, "I'm all right, sir," and avoided my needle. Beneath that smile he felt like hell. I knew it, and he knew I knew it, so I didn't argue. I said, "Well, this'll do for the time being," and gave him a stiff emetic.

Fletch grinned; I'd pulled the same trick on him, his first trip out. "That'll do it nicely, honey," he said.

Our new assistant cosmographer thanked me and turned back to his chart desk, where he began to hunch lower and lower. Finally, after less than a minute, he excused himself with a reproachful look in my direction that told me I was a bum doctor.

"And so, Fletch," I said, "it goes. If you're going to live by *inertite*, you've got to respect it." I snapped shut my kit and headed for the door. "Any odd stops this trip?"

He shook his blond head. "Straight through to Goran III, no specials."

I DESCENDED the spiral stairwell, past my quarters, down to the passenger level. The green-and-chrome roundabout corridor was significantly deserted. I studied the physiograph card slotted on the door of the first cabin, then buzzed for a view just to make sure. The guy inside flashed me right away; he was an old hand at hyperspacing, sure enough — he was reading comfortably, gave me a wave.

Sometimes they try to fake it, but you get so you can spot them. Out here, a doctor has to be a Jekyll and six benevolent Hydes: physician and surgeon, physiologist and psychiatrist, chemist and ecologist, father confessor and general factotum. He has to be brave and resourceful (that's what the travelogues say) and more than a *bissel meshugeh* (that's what I say).

At cabin 32 I needed it. When I buzzed, the viewer took a long, one-way look at me. The suspicious

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type. Then a woman's voice said:

"Come in, Petey dear."

My shoulders twitched. It ran down my arms to my hands. I pushed open the door and said, "Hello, Nyra."

She looked about the same. Space-black hair; blue eyes, a little too light, much too shrewd. Passionate mouth, the rest of her built to match. She had on a white traveling outfit, drastically cut back. I saw that she still dressed, at thirty, like a hopeful nineteen.

"Hello, Petey," she said. "Long time we don't see each other. Someone told me you were on one of these ships; I didn't know it was this one."

"Or you'd have taken another."

"I'm sure I wouldn't have cared much either way." She showed her sharp little teeth that used to shiver me through. Now I thought they looked like the incisors of a young dog.

A very young man came unsteadily out of the bathroom, wiping his face with a towel. I looked at him with pity, and, since I'm human, a touch of academic jealousy. Nyra pasted herself onto his arm. "My husband, Larry Stone," she said smugly. "Larry, this is Doctor Peter Miles, a very old friend."

His hand was dry and warm, and I thought he seemed like a nice sort; tall and wide, probably a bear-cat of a lover. Trust Nyra to pick them. She'd never stopped picking—even during our marriage.

"A very old friend," Nyra repeated, with just enough overtones to stiffen Larry's big hand in mine. His eyes flickered behind his smile, and I thought, *Tough, kid—you're on your way out. Do you know yet that she's tired of you? Want a membership card?*

I went through the motions of tending them. Nyra, like my customer in the first cabin, was used to the inertia drug. But Stone was walking in circles, and how that boy hated to admit it! I finally got a sedative and some *restorite* into him, and all of a sudden he was asleep.

Then, before I could escape gracefully, Nyra had turned on the heat—with nothing more interesting in mind than to see how uncomfortable she could make me. She kept herself between me and the door, her eyes mocking me. I sparred with her, but I'd never been able to beat her at that game, and I couldn't raise my voice in purple prose because Larry's drug-ridden sleep was disturbed and precarious.

At last I did something I'd wanted to do for a long time. I grabbed her and pulled her against me. She came right along, looking cool, helpless and a little outraged. I could read in the brightness of her eyes that she had about had her fun, and was ready to yell and sic her husky Larry on me.

I played it that way. I bent as if to kiss her—she would let it go that far, just for kicks—and at the

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last moment I clamped my hands hard around her throat.

Her yell bumped against her closed windpipe and went back down again in a hell of a hurry. Her eyes were so wide that I could see the edges of the red membrane that lined the inside of her eyelids. Then I talked to her, in a low, rotten voice.

I went all the way to the end of the nasty speech I'd so often dreamed of whispering into that pink, almost-transparent ear. Then I repeated parts of it I thought would bear repeating. Then I left.

I would have slammed the door, if a sliding spaceship door could be slammed.

THREE more cabins—two more headaches and a poor devil who wouldn't come out of his bathroom; I left him a pill on his bed—and I got another shock.

The voice that said, "Wait a minute," was pure, clean honey— golden tan, shining and sweet. I knew it well; and when she flashed me, I recognized her from many video viewings.

It was Merlin Gale. I was afraid of staring when I went in, but I didn't; I gawped. Her hair was black, like Nyra's; but whereas Nyra was strictly boudoir, Merlin Gale was sunlight and out-of-doors. Her eyes were a smoky autumn and her skin tea-rose. If I had ever thought that she was only a product of the pretty-poison greens and blues and leads that get painted on video faces to make them look acceptably inhuman to the ike, I knew better now.

I looked around for a husband. I didn't see one. Nor any sign of one.

"I'm," I said, "the ship's husband. I mean, the houseboat's physician. Oh hell, my name is Peter Miles and I'm a doctor and how do you feel?"

She was sitting cross-legged on the bed, amid a litter of magazines from the *Starling's* library. "Doctor?" she murmured. "And so nic looking too, in a stuffy sort of wa . . . all that distinguished gray hair and you're not over forty at most!"

I dropped my kit on my foot. "Thirty-eight," I said faintly. "The gray is hereditary."

"I feel awful," she went on cheerfully. "I'm glad you came. I've been toying with the idea of opening my port and ending it all."

"The port won't open," I said, "and you *look* wonderful."

I picked up the kit, fumbled out a capsule, saw that it was a cathartic, and felt around for the right tin. It evaded me with studied perversity; I finally had to take my eyes back into my own head and use them to search the kit.

My confusion kept her smile alive. "Are you always so distracted, doctor?"

"Nothing rattles me but perfection," I replied gallantly. I was rather proud of that reply, and my pride carried me right on into plain

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foolishness: "But please don't think me impulsive, Miss Gale. I've loved you for years." Which was the truth, of course; bachelor spacemen can hardly survive without some *Wunschmadchen* to carry them to and fro across the barren light-years. I had found mine—and here she was.

She leaned back, hugging her knees, and studied me with open interest. "I believe you," she said. "And I think I like it. You're the only interesting person I've seen aboard this coffin. What do you do when you're *not* rattled?"

I finally found the right tin of capsules. "I doctor," I said. "But if you get any more candid with me, you'll have to take over. I've had a rough day." I made vague motions in her direction with the capsules. "Uh—you said you weren't feeling well—"

She laughed and put out a warm hand. I sat down beside her on the bed, for the simple reason that I couldn't have stood up a second longer. "No pills," she said. "My dad and I used to space this galaxy from Sol to Magellen—*inertite's* old stuff to me."

"But you said—"

"I was bored. Reduced to reading those horrors you're sitting on. But you've cured that already, Doctor Pete."

She was grinning like an imp. No woman was going to work faster than Peter Miles. I gathered together my animal magnetism, which had been without a keeper for a long time. I said, "Dinner at six?"

"Six-thirty," she amended. "I'm doing a ship's broadcast. Jackson talked me into it, and I've got about two hours to dream up an act."

"Jackson?" I said bitterly.

"My agent. He's a dear. He has seven children and they all look like him—that is, rather like a rabbit. I don't know how he does it!" She gave me that wonderful smile that was the end of roaming, and walked me to the door. "Out now," she said. "Where do we meet?"

I told her — dining salon, third level bow, ask any steward—and left in a daze.

BACK in my own cabin, I began to set out and check the needles for Goran III. This time, when we sidestepped *out* of hyperspace, the passengers wouldn't wake up for quite a while. Not, in fact, until I had pumped them full of antitoxins.

I glanced at my schedule: 27 hours, a little over, to Goran—six more hours in hyperspace, the remainder on planetary drive. Then what? I was thinking about Merlin Gale, of course, but when I discovered that I'd been working on the Aldebaran VII needles I pulled my moonstruck self together and got down to business.

The job done, I strolled up to Control. Fletch was slouched in his big swivel-seat, staring out at the rushing varihued blur of hyperspace. I didn't have to read his thoughts

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to know them—I'd heard them all, often before, in the deliria of pilots a good deal farther gone than Fletch:

A hundred people — a hundred lives—got to world them—two light-years every second—what happens if—my God, maybe the — if I've made a mistake somewhere—

I dropped a hand on his shoulder. "Thinking about home, Fletch?"

"Yeah—in a way, lover-boy." He looked up at me. "This hyperspace run is freaky, isn't it?"

"All situations are freaky," I said. Standing beside him, I studied his blink-time against my own pulse-rate. "The reason people never learn anything from history is that most 'future' events break totally with the past. If you can't develop an attitude of total acceptance toward whatever the future might bring, you're in for a continuous series of nasty shocks."

Underneath this cushion of chatter I was watching him as closely as I dared. The flight wasn't over, but already it was clear that Fletch was through. I'd have to report him out—and I hated like blazes to do it. When we got to Goran, he would go through a company conditioner. He wouldn't know what it was, though; it would look like a runabout, or a small office, or a video booth. But when he came out he wouldn't want to hit space any more. He'd want to go back to Earth and buy a farm, maybe raise a family. The company would supply the farm.

I was still gabbing. "After all, why should the hyperspace run be any freakier than anything else?"

He rubbed a hand across his mouth, stretching the lips. "I — can't make words out of it." He was blinking steadily, but at unnaturally long intervals now. With each blink his pupils got bigger. "There's something wrong out there, baby. No stars—lotta colors—ever try to figure out what hyperspace is like, actually?"

"No Fletch. I've been told that it isn't really like anything, that it's a mathematical fiction. That's good enough for my poor brains. But if the colors bother you, why look at them?"

"They come through my eyelids —I sit here—with a hundred people under my tail—drowning in rainbows—I—I think just think what if I *didn't* then *maybe* and all those *people* and—" He was on his feet, and I hit him with the hypo on my ring—under the guise of clapping him on the shoulder. He'd think he'd passed out of his own accord; essential, or he'd smell the conditioner coming.

There's a fast turnover on hyperspace pilots. Hard come, easy go.

Ingres and von Bietz helped me lug him to his quarters. We laid him out on his bunk. He was smiling a little.

"It's a wonder," von Bietz said slowly, "that this didn't show up during his pre-flight screening."

My own eyes were on Fletch. I'd

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seen older and tougher men pull the same thing. The job was basically intolerable, and that was that; but it wouldn't do for an answer to Beetsy's implied question.

"There's a late pregnancy in cabin 18," I said shortly. "God knows how *she* got an okay for hyperspacing. But that's the way they run this line. Them as don't like it can hire out to the Mars ore run, I guess. Barring that, suppose we drop it about Fletch; he'll have it tough enough from now on."

They stood by silently while I wrote an explanatory note to Captain Stanard. I gave it to Ingres and he left for the bridge; he was up for senior pilot now that Fletch had folded.

I checked Fletch once more — he'd come out of it in roughly three hours, and then there'd be a nasty hour or so. Then Beetsy and I walked back to Control, without words, and looked at the colors.

AN hour later, the pregnancy in 18 set about clinching my point to Beetsy. The *inertite* had hit her, but good. A flustered steward called me down, and I found her in the last stage of labor. I want to go on record as saying that modern obstetrics are harder on the doctor than on the mother; she was smiling and making with ship's gossip while I sweated like a Gany on Venus. And devil take the thick-thumbed execs who won't give a space-medico trained help; they must think a high salary buys them a sorcerer. A breech delivery is a bad do for one man.

At last I spanked, and there was a healthy blatting. I left mother and infant, the one radiant and cooing, the other making like a prune wired for sound, under the wing of one of the salon waitresses; one who had been through being a new mother several times. Seeing the maroon salon-uniform reminded me of my date with Merlin Gale. I looked at my watch and swore. After eight already. I damned near spaced it to her cabin; she was there, smiling.

"Boy or girl?" she asked immediately.

"Girl—" I sighed with relief. "To be named Petrina, after me, poor accursed infant . . . I'm glad you knew. I'm terribly sorry, it was black of me not to let you know."

"A nice young lieutenant called me from the control room. He said you'd left swearing like mad, damns and blasts and the blankety-blank desk-chair spacers, so I expected you to forget."

Thank Heaven I'd done some male boasting to Ingres . . . but maybe Merlin would rather I hadn't? Or was it apparent that I had? Maybe it had been just as well . . . I was one sadly confused medico.

"Tomorrow night, then?" I said, tentatively.

"Same time, same place."

I said, "Same people—" and our gazes locked. Then, as I turned to leave, she put her hand on my arm.

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"I've met a lot of heels, Peter," she said. I knew what she meant. The Bachelor Girl of the Telewaves was famous for skinning wolves alive.

"Out here a guy doesn't get much chance to practice that stuff," I said shakily. "Or it could be I'm too old."

"Oh!" She smiled slightly. "Not that!"

I moved in.

"Now *git*, Doctor Pete," she went on hastily. "I have a thought or two to think before tomorrow night." And I found myself outside the door, with it closing on me, and she was still smiling to draw out the sting.

I took my excess nervous energy back to my quarters and used it to recheck the Goran needles. I don't keep a diary, or I'm sure I would have filled it with bad poems. At my age!

I was still checking when Stanard buzzed me.

"Petey," he said. Only the one word, but all of a sudden there was a menacing rub to the air. You globe-lubbers wouldn't know the feeling. But a spaceman knows it too well.

"What's up, Captain?"

"We don't know." His big face was all red angles in the screen, tight and watchful. "I've checked the master board and everything is dokey. But something's gone foul, I can smell it from here."

"So can I."

"Come on up to the bridge, then. Maybe we don't know what it is till it breaks, but we'd better hold a caucus."

He didn't mean Fletch, of that I was sure. The Spectre—go on, laugh—was in the hull. Stanard was already thinking of throwing everybody on inert at once, though the colors of Goran wouldn't separate out from the warring rainbows for another two hours; he would call a caucus for no other reason.

As I passed Nyra's door, I heard quarrel sounds.

I looked to the lifeshells and checked my bulger. The caucus would find nothing wrong; we would smoke and toss it around and end up nowhere; but the Spectre would remain, and would pay off in red. The spaceman's Spectre is honest: it makes no promises it can't overfulfill.

I'd remember this trip—if I was able to get off at the end of it.

* * *

TUESDAY, 10:48 P.M., SHIPTIME

FLICK.

My port was hung with salted velvet. We were out of limbo; the universe was back in space. My little monster zoomed hastily for its niche.

Everything was—normal. There was a yellow dwarf visible off to starboard—my side of the ship. That was Goran, with its family of

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six and no grandchildren; an Edge-system, with the outpost stars of the Milky Way curtaining half its heavens, and the rest an unimaginable black, sequined with far-between glows that were not stars but galaxies. I thought how glad Fletch would be to see it. It was all in all a lovely sight, and in the clear monochromatic light the Spectre seemed to evaporate. I gathered my needles and a leather case of capsules and ascended to Control, picturing a honeymoon on a world without a moon, but (forgive me) with the honey.

Ingres came out easily, and set about touching up his course, bouncing the ship a mite this way and that to get the feel of the board. He kept sneaking glances outport at Goran, obviously satisfied with the precision of his first personally-organized heave-ho out of hyperspace.

Beetsy, on the other hand, simply wouldn't wake up—it happens that way sometimes, and can frighten the hell out of a young medico the first time—so we let him sleep it off in his chair. His snoring was sinful.

Our junior cosmographer glared at me—the story of my perfidy had evidently reached him—but submitted to my supplementary dose of *restorite*. His pallor vanished almost at once, and his eyes began to sparkle. A grin started in them and spread to his lips; I threw it back at him, and that was that.

I took the kid along with me on my rounds to familiarize him with the routine. He had had nothing but standard spaceman's first-aid training, but he made a good helper, handing me the correct needles as I called their colors. We made the rounds of the gang in Operations, pumping serums, vaccines, toxoids and antibodies wholesale into them and rebalancing their hormone systems to resist—or, rather, accommodate—conditions on Goran III. Then, as we left each cubby, I gave each man his shot of *restorite* and we escaped before he became sentient. For an hour they'd all feel like absolute hell, and it was better that they be left alone with their misery.

My blase friend in the first cabin was up already, and playing himself a quiet game of Asteroids. Evidently he was somewhat *inertite*-resistant after so many years and had snapped out of it by himself. I asked him, and got the right answer: traveling salesman. I don't think I've ever seen a tougher specimen; not even our immunizing routine bothered him. It's a pity all of them aren't like that. I'd have an easier job—if I had one at all.

Larry Stone was sprawled on the bed, but Nyra wasn't around. Went walkabout, no doubt, in defiance of the alarms, and got dropped somewhere 'tweendecks or on the promenade. Her hard luck; I could trust *inertite* to keep her pinned indefinitely. Wonderful stuff, *inertite;* does things to your atoms. At least I think it's atoms.

We hit Jackson, Merlin's rabbity

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agent—the noise that had refused to come of its bathroom—who proved to be somewhat of a problem; he was sex-hormone sensitive and I had to run a titration on his blood-serum to determine what fraction of the usual shot he could take without going into aliphatic shock. The kid watched with interest, until just before the *restorite* shot, when I sent him on to Merlin's cabin to bare and bind her arm. Then I stuck the rabbit for the last time, got an appropriate squeak, and ducked out the door.

At that instant I heard the kid scream. I've spaced a long time, and heard ship's hulls ring with terror before. I ran.

He was leaning against the wall, doubled up, with his arms folded across his stomach. That time he didn't have me to blame for it. I closed my eyes so hard they clicked, then looked again. It was still there. It was stupefying—the ultimate nightmare of every hyperspace medico.

Red, red, red, all over the place. Some blobs of white and gray, some things that looked like flattened ropes, some things like chips and splinters of stone. Everything that goes to make up a human being, spread out for inspection—literally painted on walls, floor, even some on the ceiling on the far side. Smeared by a hard-striding giant. Mad red mural of instant, violent extermination.

A red mural that no one could ever identify as Merlin Gale.

I WENT quietly insane. I told the kid to call Stanard down here fast, and he moved off, crabwise. I began to cry. I ran my finger along the door jamb; it came away wet and I closed my fist on it and shook it at the air and at God.

Stanard came, his face a baby pink—the pallor of shock bleaching out his spaceburn. He'd seen all this before, in the old days, but it's a thing to which nobody can become calloused. A corpse is one thing—but this profane wash of human stuffs . . .

He looked at the cabin number. "Miss Gale?" he said. He knew it was. His mouth tucked in at the corners; his eyes were bleak holes, nightbound craters on the surface of his skull. "What happened, Petey?"

"I don't know, Cap, I don't know—"

He put a hand on my arm. "Pull yourself together, man. You've seen—"

I shook it off. "Get out!" I screamed in a whisper. "For God's sake get out!"

He didn't get out. But then he understood.

There wasn't much to look at except the garish fact. I picked up the slamband that lay in the swamp. I looked at it. Then I wrapped my handkerchief about it.

Stanard looked at my face, and what he saw jolted him back a

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step. "Petey," he said in a heavy voice. "Will you let me say that accidents do happen? You were saying the same thing to Fletch a while back, if Fletch's babbling means anything."

My voice, thread-thin, began to tear words out of my brain. "No accident. Look here, Cap."

Almost jealously I showed him the slamband. The *inertite* needle had been broken off. When I had pressed my button, the needle hadn't touched her skin. When I had pressed my button, Merlin may have been laughing, thinking of me, waiting for the weight of the *inertite* I would send her to depress her bed. When I had—

I heard my voice again, scrambled, jagged, cold, like crushed ice. "I'm going to kill whoever did this, Cap. Hear me; I'm going to kill him."

The door opened and there was Tam, the ship's detective. His pale eyes photographed the room, the captain's face, mine. "I get around," he said. "It's my job. I saw you and Miss Gale a while ago, Petey. So—I'm sorry."

And he was. Tam is all right. "See anything else, Tam?" I said.

"Nothing but Fletch. Making like a tomcat in the stairwell with that bitch from 32. His privilege, I suppose. Why?"

I showed him the shamband. He took one look, then looked back to the all-over death that flowered out from the dent in the wall. "A killing, is it?"

"And I want the killer, Tam," I said. "Give him to me when you get him, Tam."

The pale eyes warmed a little, but he said: "I can't do that, Petey. And I'll need that slamband."

"You can't have it until I've worked on it."

A cleanup detail was already standing outside the door, shifting its feet. It had to be done—a spaceship is no place for an infection to start. But when I saw the plastibags and the flamers I began to lose my mind again, to tremble and make jerky movements. *Leave it all alone,* I wanted to shout at them—*don't put Merlin in those things—don't touch her—don't sear her to ashes and gas . . .*

"You'd better turn it over," Standard said, softly, but with iron edging his voice. "Petey, I hate to do this. But there's a letter in my hands that puts this whole business in a damned odd light. I think you'd best cooperate with Tam. Or else I'll—issue the necessary orders, Petey."

I stared at him. What he said made no sense. I knew only that I wouldn't surrender that slamband, orders or no orders. I was essential to the life of the ship; there was no possible substitute or pinch-hitter for me on board. I began to back through the door.

"I'll try it my way first," I said. "This is flesh and blood and that's my field; Cap my field, Tam, doctors are detectives too in a way, don't you forget that, stay away

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from me until I'm through. Stay away from my quarters."

"You're doing yourself a bad turn, Petey," Stanard said.

"It's been done," I said. "I've had it. You'll get your slamband. But you'll wait for it. You'll have to."

I said, "Goodnight, gentlemen," in a voice as ironical as you please, but I ran my nose into the door on the way out. I was blind with scalding tears.

I could hear someone else weeping hoarsely as I passed Nyra's door. She was always good at that. And that *she* should still live . . .

IN my cabin, I became sick as the kid had been. A doctor shouldn't, but any lover would.

Finally I took out the slamband and examined it, through a fog that kept gathering in my eyes and rolling down my cheeks. At last I had to go into my bathroom and plunge my face into ice-water. I was really blind when I stood up—you can see that I was something less than a doctor right then, or I would have known what a shock I was giving my optic nerves—but the moments during which I had to wait inside the basin waiting for my sight to return were good for me.

When I came back into the cabin proper, I had no tears left. My cheeks and my fingers and my heart were icy.

The black stellon slamband was intact, save for the needle. I cleansed it carefully, making sure that I was not obliterating possible fingerprints, handling it as I had before, with cloth, gently. The strap was set to the last notch. I tried to remember: had Merlin worn it on her wrist, or on her upper arm? I couldn't remember having seen it on her at all. Probably, then, she'd worn it on her leg, just above the knee. The set of the strap confirmed that, more or less.

The needle had been snapped cleanly, not filed or dogged over or jammed. To do that, the killer had had to dismantle the pistons, for both needles hung well back in their grooves and would come out normally only in response to the buttons in my cabin. The killer, then, had a working knowledge of slambands—which eliminated the average traveler, who was told that tampering with the bands would result in an explosion.

I had scraped the bits of flesh and fine limb hair from the band before washing it. I examined these now. It is impossible to describe the detachment with which I did this. All humanity in me was far aspace; there was only an educated beast crouching at my desk.

But I found nothing. No who; no why; no when or where. Nothing but how, and that had been evident from the moment I had first picked up the slamband from the bloody jelly.

After two hours I re-wrapped the slamband, put it in a cylinder, and

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tubed it down to Tam's lab. He screened me a second later.

"Thanks for being so careful, Petey," he said quietly. "I'll do my best with—what you've left me." He was reaching toward equipment even as his screen faded.

My eyes burned. I'd smoked myself into a stupor. I lay down on my bunk. Stanard and Tam had been kind and decent, and I'd done no more than waste time. Now that Tam had the band . . .

I closed my eyes over my thoughts. Had Merlin mentioned knowing anyone on the ship? Only Jackson—no, surely not Jackson. But who then?—my thoughts returned to the rabbity man.

Then to the slamband.

Merlin . . .

A weak light was playing over my closed eyes. Goran III, inflating in my port. We would land in a few hours. I would get up and make my final round, to see how my shots had taken. Then we'd go out; I would show Merlin the alabaster towers, the chattering native section, the shielded and unapproachable continent where the beings from Goran IV, in exile, held themselves aloof from all the rest of the galaxy. I would kiss her and we would be married.

Sleeping is practice for death. That night I became an expert.

* * *

WEDNESDAY, 11:22 A.M., SHIPTIME

I BEGAN the final round that morning like a robot interne; the sleep hadn't helped. I moved automatically, doing what I had to do, avoiding thinking about that moment to come when I would have to pass Merlin's cabin without stopping, and listen to the silence welling out of it.

Ingres and Beetsy both seemed to be under considerable strain. I felt a sort of repressed, uneasy sympathy; neither of them would meet my eyes for more than a moment at a time, and they submitted to my tests with no chitchat other than a few monosyllabic platitudes. At another time I might have been more sensitive to it, and hence more curious, but now it barely reached me. I was numbly glad not to have to talk.

My oldtimer told me briefly that he was all right, just running the usual post-shot fever. How was I? The brief question from him touched me more than a thousand effusions from someone else would have—but I could not afford to have any emotions now. I said stiffly that I was all right and went on.

Mother was convinced that baby was going to die. I assured her that it was only post-shot fever. She didn't believe me. I didn't care.

Before I reached Nyra's cabin my nostrils began to twitch. I smelled something damned familiar—as familiar and as characteristic as

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the odor of cinnamon or citrus oil or vinegar. But half my brains were out of circuit with grief. I couldn't place it, though I tried without much interest.

It was very powerful right in front of Nyra's cabin. I buzzed long and loud. When the door slid back the odor came rolling out in great waves.

Larry Stone stood in the partly-open door, blocking the way. His face was damp, and his big shoulders hunched when he saw me. I said expressionlessly, "Hello, Stone. Did you find Nyra?"

"Find—Nyra?"

"That's what I said. I hadn't the time nor the spirit to go scouring the decks for her after what happened. Did you find her, or is she still sprawled in some bunk in the crew's quarters?"

It was brutal, but what could I care then for the puppy's feelings? Curiously, he took no offence—perhaps he had learned a few things about Nyra. He said, "Yes. Sorry. I found her. She's all right."

"Better let me check her. She shouldn't be under *inertite* this long. Take only a moment."

"She—I believe she's out strolling the deck someplace. I gave her the *restorite* shot myself." He turned slightly to wave at some apparatus on the cabin desk. "I knew how things were with you, Doctor Miles. I felt I shouldn't bother you, and I've had considerable experience in physical chemistry."

That was the odor. I said. "She's just coming out of it now?"

"Yes, but she seems all right. I'd appreciate it if you waited to check on her. She's—"

"I know how she is," I told him. I could just see Nyra, awakening reluctantly at noon after a long night, part of which she had spent in the wrong bed. But there was nothing I could do about that. "I'll have to check, Larry, if you please. It's my responsibility, and the line's. Besides, I've seen some bad things happen, even in experienced hands; you'll understand that I can't trust a physical chemist to be a doctor too."

He didn't move. "I can assure you—"

"I can't take your assurance." My patience was beginning to evaporate.

He moved then, just enough to get himself more firmly in the way. "I've paid for privacy," he said coldly. "I'm sure I can demand it from the captain."

"Fine," I said, reaching for the buttons beside the door. "I'll buzz the captain right now." While I was at it, I buzzed Tam, too. Even the wolverine that was eating out my heart hadn't been able to prevent me from noticing certain things. One of them was the odor, which was that of *restorite* in the second, *not* the third and final stage of its distillation. If Nyra had been shot full of that stuff, she was dead; if she hadn't, then she was still under wherever she was, which was certainly not strolling the deck. And

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if she was still under, then it had not been Nyra I had heard crying last night; it had been *Larry Stone*—perhaps after he had killed her with his shot of underprepared *restorite?* Or after he had been deserted for some crewman for the night?

In an incredibly short time I was able to introduce Larry to Captain Standard and to Tam—for some reason—to Ingres. Sullenly Larry stood back to let us in. The Cap's face was a mask of iron; Tam studied us alternately, first me, then Larry, then me again.

On the desk an atoburner flamed under a squat tripod, and a retort dripped clear liquid into a testube.

Nyra was nowhere in the cabin.

STONE sat down on the edge of the bed, looking like a cornered animal, head down, eyes gleaming up.

"So she went strolling," I said. "The dead go strolling. Or else she's here, still alive, but invisible."

His lips started to tremble; he pressed them together and stared at the floor. Tam's face took on a professional hardness. He said, "Where's your wife, sonny?"

"I don't know."

"Then why are you distilling *restorite* for her?"

"She has to be on board ship somewhere," he said. "I wanted to get her back in here before she was found. I was ashamed—is that so strange? If she doesn't care which bed she sleeps in any more, I do. I wanted to get off-ship with her without my horns showing to everybody on board. But I haven't been able to find her. Why haven't *you* found her? It's your responsibility."

It was, too. Larry's explanation was hard to listen to, but it held water.

That is, it held water to me. But Stanard's face did not alter, and Tam kept looking at me now and then with that inexplicable searching expression. The Cap said:

"Mr. Stone, I'm not entirely satisfied. For one thing, there's a letter in my possession—"

That letter! I hadn't thought of it again until now. I still didn't understand it.

But Larry Stone did. He seemed to melt. He slumped forward and retched slightly, his face in his hands. "That letter," he moaned. "You've read it. Oh, my God, why should Nyra write such a letter? She told me about it—she read it to me—she *laughed!*"

"I've read it," Stanard said. "So you can understand that, because of the letter, I have to regard our failure to find her here as very serious."

He swung on me. "Just in case you're ignorant of all this, Petey—and I hope to God that you are—Mrs. Stone sent me the letter yesterday, after we were a few hours out. It was rather incoherent, but in essence it said that she feared a violent death at the hands of her husband. However, she didn't say which husband she meant—and we

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have two of them on board—"

"Oh," I said. It seemed funny to me. I had already lost my life. I had nothing left me that any human force could threaten. But now I understood why Ingres was here. The Cap had expected, if things turned out for the worst all the way around, that he would have to take both of us—Larry and me—into custody.

"I think I know where Nyra is," I said remotely. "Fletch's cabin. We've left Fletch pretty much to his own devices. According to Tam here, Nyra turned out to be one of his devices. I'm surprised I didn't think of it before."

Tam snapped his fingers. "So am I. Ingres, take a run up to Fletch's cabin and check. But go easy—just take a listen at his door, maybe a peek. Fletch is in bad shape. No need to turn him upside down, if they're there—"

Ingres nodded and went out without looking at Stone.

"But Fletch isn't *really*—" I started to say, dully.

"In the meantime, Mr. Stone," Tam broke in briskly, "one more question. Your arm is bare. Where's your slamband?"

That got to me. I jumped. I hadn't noticed. But Tam, of course, was one of the world's most expert noticers.

It got to Larry, too. He screamed, a high, pure note like the E above high C of a *castrato*. He was up in a flash and clawing at the drawer of the wall-cabinet at the head of the bed.

Tam shot both knobs off the drawer so fast that they seemed to explode simultaneously. Larry snatched his hand back and looked at it as if to make sure he still had it.

"The next one's for you," Tam said flatly. "Blurt it out, sonny. Did you fix that slamband?"

"Fix it?" Larry moaned. "Fix it? My God, it was *my* slamband she was wearing! I didn't touch it. I didn't know it had failed until I—"

He staggered suddenly into the bathroom and lost his breakfast. Tam let him go, naturally, but not out of sight. After a while he came out again, talking in a slow, sick voice even before he sat down:

"When I came out of the *inertite* I went looking for her. We'd had a quarrel before the needles hit us. She walked out—said she was going to Miss Gale's cabin to borrow something to read. So I went there. And I found—"

His mouth jerked shut; his arms corded as he balled his fists and drummed them on his knees. He needed a doctor. I didn't volunteer. "I found what you found," he gasped. "Christ, you *saw* it—blood and bone and hair—you *saw* Nyra—"

"Nyra!" I echoed, amazed and, for some reason, furious. "What makes you think it was your wife? It was—" And I stopped short. My heart seemed to charge up and ex-

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plode behind my eyes. And suddenly I remembered— I *knew!*

Among the blood, the shredded flesh—*there had been hair on that slamband!*

Glory burst in my brain. "Merlin!" I cried. "Damn you, Stone—*where is Merlin?"*

Tam's eyes flew to me, sharp and sad—then suddenly wide with utter blank astonishment.

"In there," Stone choked, and pointed to his wardrobe closet. "She's in there—"

I took a swing at him, missed, bent head and shoulders into the closet and started to cry again.

ONLY when I had Merlin's rigid body in my arms did I think again. "Cap!" I said hoarsely. "Ingres—we sent him to Fletch's cabin —Fletch'll kill him—for God's sake, move—it was Fletch who fixed Stone's slamband—"

Tam and Stanard turned white and vanished. Stone was weeping convulsively. A second later, theship was ringing with Stand to Quarters. The Cap knew Fletch, all right.

I carried Merlin to my quarters. She was still unconscious, of course. *Inertite* keeps you under indefinitely. But the space-fixing effect—which makes *inertia* what it is in interstellar travel—wears off very rapidly, and after that the drug is simply an inferior inducer of suspended animation. I could only hope that she was still alive.

But I had to believe that. I measured the *restorite* and injected it.

She half rose to meet me, frightened by my grim face, the strange surroundings. But she was equal to it. What a wonder she was, wonder upon wonder!

"Peter dear," she said, grappling to my shoulder for support. "Have you gone and compromised me?"

The next half hour is nobody's business. It happens that way; and we had a lifetime for explanations. If it was a girl, we would name it *Starling* . . . that was our whispered agreement.

But one impulse I could not resist, when we finally got around to talking with words. I stroked her soft, dark head, and said, "We had an accident and a woman was killed. I was crazy for a while, but at the last I knew she wasn't you."

She made a pretty frown. "Wasn't me, Peter?"

She didn't understand, of course. I smiled, took a wisp of hair between my thumb and forefinger, and tugged.

"Oh!" She said indignantly. Then, in a tiny voice: "Hell, you had to know sometime. As if you didn't already."

"I knew the moment I saw you. Any physician would. But it's so common, I just didn't think about it again—you Earth-bound people don't realize how normal it is among spacemen. It must have happened when your father was spacing, and took you along as a kid—"

She nodded and grabbed it back

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from me, put it expertly on again. "Think of my public," she murmured.

"I'm your public," I said. I traced the smoothness of her leg with one finger.

Radiation. Space-baldness. An occupational hazard with early hyperspacers, before the perfection of the Sorenson shields. No head hair; no body hair.

No hair to find on a slamband had my Merlin.

And it had been right under my nose all the time.

AT the end, just before landing, I talked to Fletch. Not because I wanted to, but because he would talk to no one else. Me he trusted—why, I don't know.

I brought him a cup of coffee for an excuse. He was sitting in his cell, looking out at the black and silver and the nearing globe Goran III. It was a big Florida orange now, cloud-laced, sea-sparkled. We were blasting toward nightside. Fletch drank the coffee in silence, and at last looked at me.

"Nyra wasn't worth it, Fletch," I said.

"I know that," he said. "Larry Stone is okay after all—not that I like the bastard, but I'll admit he's okay. I was potty to credit what she told me about him. Beatings and so forth. But I was potty anyhow, sweetheart. Everybody agreed on that."

I shook my head. "Not everybody. I knew that breakdown of yours was a phony—but it was all the more reason to put you on the shelf, as far as I was concerned. It was the expert job on the slamband, and Tam's spotting you and Nyra in heat, that really did for you. Pretty clumsy, Fletch."

"Maybe so, lover boy. Ever since you told me that the future is just a series of cataclysms, I've been getting myself used to the notion. But what I want to know is—what the hell *happened?* I had Larry's slamband fixed but good, and Nyra had sent the Cap her letter to make it all look like a murder attempt that back-blasted. And then—" his face was white and loose—"then—"

"Let it lay, Fletch. I thought it was Merlin for a while. So must you have, and blasted in orbits trying to figure it out. Now you know it was Nyra. So I know how you feel."

"But *what the hell happened?*" Fletch repeated plaintively. "Nyra got Stone out of the cabin for a walk and I did exactly what we'd planned. Her slamband was supposed to be on the bed, with its strap lengthened for her leg. Stone's was the wrist-set band on the desk. I jimmied the wrist-set one on the desk. So *how*—"

"I'll tell you what happened, Fletch—" and I told him what Larry Stone had told me. "After Larry and Nyra came back from that walk, Nyra went in to take a shower. While she was in the bathroom,

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Larry decided to put on his band before going to sleep so he wouldn't have to get up when the on-bands alarm sounded. He put on Nyra's band because he was lying in bed and it was nearest at hand, and because he was as miserable as a kid cuckolded by his first love can be. Then, because he's a considerate kid, he reached over and got his own band from the desk and lengthened the strap and put it on the bed beside him, ready for Nyra when she came out. Then he went to sleep. He loved her, Fletch, and that's what happened."

Fletch stared out the port, face rigid.

"You loved her too, Fletch—maybe still do?"

"Like crazy—the beautiful bitch! All I was to her was a hot playmate and a perfect way to get rid of a used-up husband. I'd have been dropped soon enough. I know that now. And it doesn't help one God damned bit—"

I sighed, and went on: "Later, when the alarm went off, Nyra left the cabin so she wouldn't get messy—or killed — when Larry went splash. She woke him up to get in some last digs, and told him she was going to Merlin's cabin to borrow something to read; then she evidently decided she might just as well do that as stand around in the corridor, waiting for the needle. Merlin had barely opened the door and said hello when the needles hit and she dropped. A second later the HS drive cut out, and Nyra, with no shot of *inertite* in her, was in effect flung through the door and against the wall at twice times the speed of—"

Fletch groaned. "Let *that* lay, honey!"

"Okay, Fletch. For good. Well—then I made my rounds. I gave Larry his shots; and the first thing he did was go looking for Nyra. Somewhere along the line he passed me and the kid I had helping me, unnoticed; he found—Nyra — and he found Merlin, lying beside the door.

"His actions at that point need a little explaining. Before Nyra sent that letter to Stanard, she had herself a little fun reading it to Larry. She always did that kind of thing well—probably made quite a production of it—and it put Larry into a long, flat spin. Probably his first inkling that Nyra was—the person she was. As you said, he's a big, decent kid—wouldn't suspect a cannibal that was weighing him.

"Anyway, when he found Merlin, he knew that the—other—must be Nyra. That knowledge — and the sight itself—threw him out of gear. He was terrified that discovery of her death, along with the letter, would make him out a murderer. So he picked up Merlin and carried her back to his own cabin through the emergency corridor, just about the time I was sending the kid on ahead to her cabin. He put her in his closet—even tried to make her com-

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fortable with pillows—and worked like the devil all night and morning making *restorite* for her."

"Cool," Fletch nodded, understanding.

"If a sort of psychic catatonia can be described as 'cool'—yes. He was planning, of course, to revive her before we landed and force her to walk off-ship with him as his wife, veiled probably. Then he'd let her go and vanished into the exile continent, or ridden the skins out to the Edge."

Fletch managed a smile. "He didn't have a chance. For one thing, the Goran quarantine station would have looked under that veil . . . God! Like you say, catastrophe—one after another after another."

"A catastrophe is a surprise," I said. "Not all surprises are unpleasant. In the old days they'd have shot you. Now you'll just get a Class A conditioning. You'll forget this—every bit of it. Maybe you'll wind up a farmer. Does it sound good?"

He turned from the port and looked at me with eyes like twin gates to Hell. "I'll really forget?" he whispered.

"Yes, Fletch." I was gathering his personal belongings. "We'll be landing in a moment. Ready?"

He stood up slowly. "Sure, friend," he said. "Let's go."

TAM was waiting outside the cell, hand in pocket. He took the hand out empty when he saw Fletch's face. We joined the group in Control. A very intent Ingres was juggling the *Starling* toward the quarantine station; Marlin was watching him, vastly interested. Beetsy was at the screen, chatting with the station master.

Fletch sank into the co-pilot's seat and stared hungrily at the bright surface of Goran III. Stanard looked at me, and then went over and sat down beside Fletch. They didn't speak much, but I learned something about Stanard then. He had loved Fletch. I could tell, because something he said made Fletch turn and smile.

And Stanard had said nothing, done nothing, from the moment Fletch had staged his breakdown until the end. That's why Stanard is captain of the *Starling*.

As Ingres goosed the ship to within yards of the graving dock, and tractors and spacesuited men started toward us, Merlin walked to Fletch and touched his forehead lightly. She, too, understood.

That's why Merlin is my wife—and why our son is named for a murderer.

THE END.

SPECIAL NOTICE

We're receiving so many items for the Personals Column that in the future we're going to have to cut down on the long, itemized lists of material wanted or for sale in order to run notices for more fans. If you are looking for, or are trying to dispose of, large quantities of material, please just give general information and have interested fans write for complete list.

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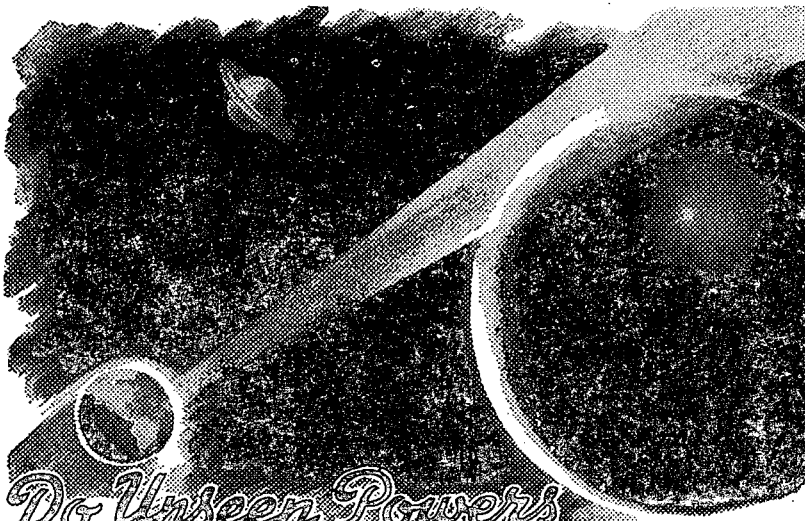

Do Unseen Powers Direct Our Lives?

ARE the tales of strange human powers false? Can the mysterious feats performed by the mystics of the Orient be explained away as only illusions? Is there an intangible bond with the universe beyond which draws mankind on? Does a mighty Cosmic intelligence from the reaches of space ebb and flow through the deep recesses of the mind, forming a river of wisdom which can carry men and women to the heights of personal achievement?

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Scribe **G. X. A.**
THE ROSICRUCIANS, AMORC
San Jose, California

I am sincerely interested in knowing more about this unseen, vital power which can be used in acquiring the fullness and happiness of life. Please send me, without cost, the book, "The Mastery of Life," which tells how to receive this information.

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Illustration by Jon Arfstrom

Pavlovich stood in the doorway, radium pistol threatening

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The GOLDEN GUARDSMEN

By S. J. Byrne

(*Part Two*)

Once again Nicholas I held Earth helpless in his grasp—and only Germain could circumvent him. But Germain floated helplessly in space!

Synopsis of part one

WORLD War III began with Nicholas I of New Russia, who ruled the Earth with an iron hand, enjoying a greater might and power than Hitler or Napoleon or Genghis Kahn. However, his downfall began with Stephen Germain, whom he had transformed into a surgical mutant. As a result, Germain rose up to help Agarthi and the Elder Race against him and his interstellar allies, who had held Earth in secret bondage for ages. Nicholas and some of his aides attempted to escape from Earth in a space ship conceived of by Germain, but the Elder People sought to destroy him. His ship was destroyed, but he and one aide, Sergeyev Pavlovich, managed to make a landing on Mars in a small commuter vessel. There, for almost a year, they search for the mysterious and elusive overlords of Mars, the much feared Nrlani race, who they feel may be able to help them reconquer Earth. The surface of Mars is inhabited by the nomadic Gdjinhji who sometimes frequent the haunted ancient cities of the early pyramid builders and moon worshippers—an archaeological mystery. Beneath the surface of Mars are slave cities and factories where Gdjinhji prisoners, under the mental control of telepathic robots built by the Nrlani, are engaged in ceaseless preparations for a superman war against Earth and against even the authority of the Elder Race. Nicholas and his companion, Pavlovich, finally locate the town of Druhdrui, among ancient pyramids, where they are taken in by the Martian girl, Trinha Llih and her father, Grlahn, a greedy merchant who wishes to capitalize on their presence. Having learned some of the language by now, Nicholas tells them who he is and warns them of Stephen Germain. He is determined to return and conquer Germain, but he needs their help, he says, and he needs the help, particularly, of the Nrlani. He understands

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that the Nrlani make an appearance once in a Martian year at Druhdrui. Terrified, the natives inform him that no one seeks the Nrlani for fear of ending up in a Martian slave city. They fear especially the overlord chief of the Nrlani, Izdran of a "Thousand Lives." It is Izdran, precisely, whom Nicholas wishes to contact. While waiting for the Nrlani to appear, Nicholas is given Trinha Llih by her father. She comes to him in the hopes of fulfilling a childhood belief in an old fairytale, in which Mrahl Sahn, Prince of the Sky, takes her away with him to Pahn (Earth), Guardian Star of the Twin Moons (Deimos and Phobos). But Nicholas casts her to Pavlovich and dreams, instead, of another woman like her with raven black hair—of Lillian Germain, Stephen Germain's wife, whom he once held captive and whom he is determined to take again. For this, Trinha hates him and vows a personal vengeance of her own. When the Nrlani appear in their sky city above Druhdrui, they emerge out of apparent nothingness and Pavlovich is afraid, but Nicholas tells him that there is no sphere of supernatural phenomena, that all is physical reality—even Heaven, itself, if such a thing existed. He tells him that nothing can violate the physical fundamental of Cause and Effect, and that as such the sky city might be understood and even conquered. The Nrlani bring the Gdjinhji a narcotic called ca'ta, used only by the male Martians, in exchange for a sticky substance found on Mars, called grabdal. In the process of this bartering, Nicholas contacts Izdran, presents his case, and is invited into the sky city. However, he and Pavlovich are followed by Trinha Llih, who professes an insatiable desire to travel into space and perhaps one day reach Panh (Earth). In the sky city they are confronted by Izdran physically, and he proves to be so inhuman in appearance that even Nicholas' first reaction is to try to kill him, which proves to be a futile gesture. Izdran is an alien creature of superhuman abilities, possessed of multiple hearts and a dual mind and personality capable of working independently of each other. He and his race are the remnants of a civilization that once flourished on Nr-lan, the fifth planet, which is now represented by the asteroid belt. Actually, the Elder Race blasted their planet out of existence, but some of the Nrlani escaped into secret hiding, where they have been preparing for millenia of time to emerge and take over again. These creatures are anathema to human life, but Nicholas makes a bargain with them and is promised a Quisling rulership of Earth — although Izdran readily perceives the treacherous Earthman has secret plans of his own in that regard. Nicholas proceeds Earthward with a space armada manned by telepathic robots, which are remotely controlled through Nrlanian Central Control, a secret place whose location the Nrlani will not divulge, as

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it is their nerve center and the secret of their power. Nicholas takes Trinha Llih with him, partly on the insistence of Izdran, who hopes to use her, under telepathic control of one of his dual minds, as a pawn. Pavlovich, in a deadly ship especially prepared for the task, is given the suicidal assignment of surprising Stephen Germain and destroying him while he is momentarily outside the protection of Agarthi.

Germain, in the company of his old battle buddy, Michael Kent, is engaged in an argument before the Council of the Terrestrial Government on Earth as Pavlovich approaches. He has told Earth that the Elder Race, before it departed for its distant home, assigned him the office of Star Warden, entailing responsibility for the safety of the Solar System. He explains that Terrestrial Government is sovereign, but that they must accept the Agarthian Charter which provided an Emergency Clause whereby Agarthi would take over maritial law control of Terrestrial Government in the event of extra-terrestrial aggression. He is rebuked by Gormski, Soviet representative to the Council. The Council representatives are unaware that at that moment a superman war hangs over their heads, and that it is Germain, alone, who can save them. They are arrogant and spurn his help, accusing him of using his mutant faculties to pull the wool over their eyes and thus gain power over the Earth. In disgust, Germain and Kent return hastily to Agarthi and there go into a conference with the Agarthian Elders and the Golden Guardsmen, whose leader is Steve Rockner. There Dr. Borg explains that the enemy is using a new type of energy which he and Dr. Grange refer to as "second order" energy. They are working on a method of penetrating the enemy's second order screens. They also point out that the flying saucers are living creatures of the void which, in some way, are connected with the Nrlani. Germain senses imminent danger to himself and he sends Lillian, his wife, to Guam in the company of Kent, as on Guam he has a laboratory fortress which contains Elder Race gear. He feels she, too, is endangered, and believes that she will be safest there.

Then Pavlovich attacks him, because he did not reach Earth in time to strike at him while he was in New York. In the course of the attack, Germain demonstrates mutant powers he did not know he possessed. They drive Pavlovich and his robots off after Borg and Grange actually develop second order defenses.

Nicholas has been delaying his own grand attack because he has been working out a plan whereby he will gain direct control of the robot fleets and wrest power from the Nrlani. To do this, he rescues Gerhardt Eidelmann, former Nazi scientist and experimenter with Elder Race equipment, from his prison in Berlin. As the Terrestrial Government, suspecting the presence of the

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invisible robot fleet, scorns Germain's warnings and engages the Nrlanian ships in space battle, they are literally mowed down. This causes Agarthi to gird itself and its allies, the Lunar Interstellars, for battle. Pavlovich contacts Trinha Llih in the camp of Nicholas I in Russia and she advises him that Eidelmann is about to succeed in giving Nicholas separate control over the robots. Still seeking vengeance against Nicholas and actually guided by Izdran, she uses Pavlovich by pretending to care for him. Together, they plan to take over Eidelmann's invention, which would place the Nrlanian robot fleet in Pavlovich's hands.

In the meantine, it appears that Kent has been obsessed by Izdran while enroute to Guam with Lillian. He hands her over to the Nrlani without remembering that he had acted as their pawn. Germain communicates telepathically with Kent's sister, Yvonne, who lives in the Guam laboratory. He instructs her to activate a dreaded Elder machine of great and mysterious power — the Chronoperceptor. Germain is especially concerned and angered as he and the Golden Guardsmen plunge into outer space to join their allies, the Lunar Interstellars, to engage the enemy, because Lillian Germain had just informed him, prior to her abduction, that she was going to experience a "blessed event . . ."

Now go on with the story . . .

"SAMMY, you sell newspapers. You ought to have an idea about what's goin' on. What d'ya think?"

High-powered traffic thrummed along Main Street where the car tracks used to be. There were no more street cars. There were helicopter commuters.

Sammy thought: Thank God there's still hot dogs! I can understand hot dogs. And coffee! They can raise our taxes and feed us all the bull they want, but we won't take any substitute for coffee!

He sank his teeth into his hot dog and chewed a while, watching Pete, the car lot attendant, and old cock-eyed Jules behind the counter. They were ordinary earthy guys who were just as mixed up as he was.

"We got Universal Government now," put in Jules, reflectively flipping Pete's hamburger over on the griddle. "So how come there's war emergency? Who's fightin' who—and *what?*"

"Well," said Pete, "it's Nicholas again, or at least they think. He wasn't satisfied with startin' World War Three and running most of the governments on Earth. When they chased him clear off it he picked up some ammunition on Mars. Now he's back with ships and an army."

"Mars!" snickered Jules. "Next you'll be swallowing that bunk about robots!"

"That's what they *say!*" Pete insisted. "He's got a whole army of robots, and they run his space

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ships, too. If that's not so, why did we just send out all our own ships —the new space fleet that all our taxes went into? I tell you, we're in danger of extra-cerestial regression or whatever it is they call it in the papers."

"With Universal Power?" sneered Jules. "We can wipe out everything!"

"Don't be so sure," said Sammy, at last. "You know what Stephen Germain told them at the U.N. By being able to go to other planets we put ourselves in danger of being attacked by stuff that's way over our heads. I think we should let him and Agarthi have their Emergency Clause in the Terrestrial Government Charter. I think we need their help. In fact they're probably going to help even if we don't want it."

Jules' crossed eyes glared. "Sammy, I should have poisoned that hot dog! You're a sucker like the rest of them! I think Gormski's right —Russian or no Russian. He told the U. N. that Germain might stage a war of the worlds or make us *think* we saw strange space ships, just to get us to accept the Emergency Clause. If we had, he'd be our dictator right now! I think this scare is all a thing cooked up by Germain. He's a mutant. He's not one of us. We gotta stick up for our rights. You talk about Nicholas! He just wanted to rule the Earth. Germain calls himself the *Star* Warden! That means he's trying to glom on to the whole damn solar system!"

Pete drank coffee and shut up. He had seen this kind of argument start brawls every day for the past three days. It was worse than arguing about the World Series. Now *there* was something he would rather talk about. Baseball. Thank God there was still baseball. *That* he could understand!

"I think it's all over our heads," said Sammy. "If I was a candidate for World President, my platform would be: 'Give the world back to the people.' Right now it's for the birds. Not even the politicians know what's cookin'!"

"Hey!" Pete exclaimed, pointing at the side entrance of the bar next door. "Millie has finished her act!"

Sammy looked through the entrance and saw Millie the burlesque queen, seated on a bar stool with a drink in one hand and a cigarette, plus a holder, in the other. Her dress was above her knees, showing a yard or so of white flesh composed of calf and thigh. Her legs were crossed in a deliberately provocative pose as she watched Pete.

"Pete," said Jules, reproachfully, "you got a wife and three kids. Why don't you lay off Millie?"

"Christ!" said Pete. "Could you? She's gorgeous!"

"Yeah," said Sammy, "but I don't like it when it's so easy to get. Come to think of it, though, it ain't like the good old days. Everything's easy to get these days!"

An indefatigable troop of Salvation Army workers came by, singing

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the Battle Hymn of the Republic. A young girl came to Pete rattling a tambourine.

"Give a gift to the Lord, brother," she said.

Pete grinned, sarcastically. "Who's *He* payin' taxes to?"

An enraged evangelist behind the girl overheard him. "Repent ye!" he shouted. "For the day of the Lord is at hand!"

"Why don't you crack-pots give up!" exclaimed Pete. "You're all a broken record!"

"Yeah," put in Sammy, "Heaven's probably got troubles enough these days without crack-pots trying to save the likes of us. G'wan, beat it!"

The evangelist straightened his shoulders and led his troop onward, to the beat of a forlorn sounding drum. They sang:

"I have read a fiery gospel, writ in burnished rows of steel:
"'As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall deal;
"'Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel . . .'"

* * *

AT LAKE SUCCESS, the quasi-established Terrestrial Government reconvened its Supreme Council. Michael Kent, the Agarthian representative, had the floor. Not that his legality had been cleared. Soviet representative Gormski and other Eurasian colleagues would not recognize Agarthi as a member. But the Council had voted to hear his version of what had happened since adjournment on the previous Wednesday when Germain had given his ultimatum that they must accept the Emergency Clause.

"It is very *apropos*," said Kent, before a battery of microphones and TV cameras, "to quote Mr. Germain on one point brought out in the last session. He said: 'You have now emerged from the cocoon of your own atmosphere. Terrestrial Man is a new metamorphosis taking wing in the limitless oceans of outer space. This is a form of rebirth, gentlemen, and I assure you that the mortality rate in such cases is high . . .

"'The dangers, let me remind you, are far from being behind you. They lie ahead. You are not expected to acquire overnight an adequate perspective of the incomprehensible. You are merely expected to accept protection and guidance until you have progressed sufficiently to carry on independently yet in cooperation with universal civilization.'"

Kent looked beyond the light banks, out at the dark crescent of humanity that was his audience—representatives of all the nations of the world. What could they know of the *real* facts? How could he convince them that they were only cattle compared to the alien force with which Nicholas the First had somehow become connected?

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"To be brief," he continued, "Agarthi has already been attacked. Our own forces have been dispatched to meet the enemy."

Gormski rose to his feet and demanded to have the floor, which the Chairman granted. "If this is so," he almost shouted, "then why did not our giant radar screens, capable of detecting every meteor from here to the moon, detect this enemy fleet?"

There was applause and laughter, but Kent interrupted. "Because of a science unknown to you. These aliens use a second order type of energy which screens them against all primary types of energy including electro-magnetic waves."

"Then why," shouted Gormski, "did not Agarthi warn the nations of the Earth that this danger faced us all?"

Again there was applause. Kent took a big breath.

"Because," he said, "Germain did not want to send you to slaughter. You should not have dispatched your fleets. They will be destroyed."

Gormski winked at several of his colleagues and smiled derisively. "May I remind you, Mr. Kent, that Universal Power is as far beyond atomic energy as was the latter beyond chemical energy? We have bought from Agarthi the indisputable super science that you claim was given to you by the so-called Elder Race. Each of our space warships is now equivalent to Earth's total armaments of only a generation ago. And there are *thirty* of them patrolling the void at this moment. Do you suggest that the forces of the Terrestrial Government are totally inadequate and that only your own forces could protect us?"

"I do," Kent's gaze was even, unperturbed, confident. "You are inexperienced—babes in the woods. And worst of all—you are over-confident."

Mr. Balfour, the U. S. representative, requested the floor.

"May we ask," he said, "just what your own forces consist of?"

"You may," replied Kent. "Of the Agarthian old line fleet of Elder type ships there are twenty-five. Your ships are fifty thousand ton vessels. The Agarthian ships are two hundred and fifty thousand ton vessels, equipped with apparatus that your most modern physicists would need a year of additional training even to begin to comprehend. The very specialized Golden Guardsman fleet consists of a hundred vessels, each of which is equivalent in destructive power to your entire fleet. You have often raised the question: How can Agarthi support a superior armaments program when the combined tax income of the world could only build thirty Terrestrial Government ships? The answer is, gentlemen, that we have been riding heavily on reserve resources left us ages ago by the Elder Race. Now those reserves have

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been depleted, and that is why we have had to sell Agarthian science to the outside world on the basis of fifty million dollars per year. There are other resources, also, of a nature which I am not permitted to describe, but as time goes on we will actually need Terrestrial Government appropriations to continue the work of making Earth safe in relation to interstellar civilization. However, to continue. There is also another force, an ally of ours, an ally in whose existence you do not believe. The Lunar Interstellars, a benevolent colony of interstellar people who took refuge inside the moon ages ago when they discovered Earth was secretly in the thralldom of malignant interstellar influences. When Agarthi opened warfare against those malignant forces, the Lunar Interstellars joined forces with us and the Elder Race to make Earth free of secret bondage for the first time in thousands of years. Now, in the face of this new and perhaps even greater threat, the Lunar Interstellars have joined us once more, with a hundred and sixty magnificent vessels that would make yours look like covered wagons!"

Gormski sprang to his feet, characteristically. "This is preposterous!" he shouted. "It is again a hoax to inspire fear and to promote acceptance of the Emergency Clause whereby Agarthi could rule us all in the event of extra-terrestrial aggression!"

"Then what of Russia's present predicament?" put in Kent. "Has not Nicholas returned, backed by this alien force, determined to take the Earth again? Can you deny that everything from Baku to Kharkov has been taken and that Irkutsk is dominated at this moment by an alien warship and an army of robots?"

"That Nicholas has returned from hiding we do not deny," said Gormski. "But robots and alien space armadas are questionable. Can't you recognize propaganda when you see it?"

"Would Nicholas, who is Germain's sworn enemy, collaborate with him in this 'hoax,' as you call it, to inspire fear of extra-terrestrial aggression?" queried Kent.

"Gentlemen!" interposed Dr. Jorge Calaveras, the Peruvian Chairman, in Esperanto. "This is getting us nowhere! Mr. Kent was originally given the floor to inform us of the nature of the enemy, according to Agarthian investigations. So the Chair is calling upon Mr. Kent to give us that information."

Kent looked at all of them. "How can I explain that which you could never understand?"

"Explain yourself, Mr. Kent."

"An alien force, perhaps dangerous even to the Elder Race, itself, has emerged from age-long secret hiding. One of their weapons happens to be the much discussed flying saucers."

There ensued a burst of laughter, but he continued: "Doctors Borg

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and Grange, working in the Agarthian laboratories, succeeded in trapping one of these flying saucers. They are not ships, gentlemen. They are living, sentient creatures. Their movements have a direct relationship with the movements of the alien fleet we have detected. We believe them to be under the control of the unknown robot masters. We do not know what they can do, but we have reason to believe that they are the enemy's greatest reserve weapon."

"Assuming for the moment, that what you say is true—" The Chairman's opening remark was interrupted by derisive laughter. "Only for the sake of argument!" he protested, pounding with his gavel for order. "What does Agarthi think is the source of this hidden enemy? Is it Mars?"

"We believe that Mars is only a part of the picture. The robot masters, themselves, may come from another plane of existence."

Gormski was on his feet again. "In other words, Mr. Kent, you propose that Heaven, itself, is our present enemy?"

It was an obvious slap in the face and it touched off the Irish in Michael Kent. Why not give them the works? — he thought. We're the ones who'll have to fight their battles for them!

"Heaven," he answered, "is not our enemy. But the enemy may be a threat to Heaven."

Half the Council was on its feet booing. "He's mad!" "Throw him out!" "He's wasting our time!" "This is an insult to our intelligence!"

Kent was thinking of the cybernetics lab in Agarthi and of conclusions of which Germain had informed him. He remembered Germain's exact words: "I mean a much greater danger than mere space armadas . . . I mean—stuff like political corruption, graft, embezzlement, juvenile delinquency, the collapse of moral standards, lower church attendance, the increase of divorces, murders, suicides, infanticides, patricides, perversion, narcotics addiction, *et cetera* . . . The computers show that the rapid increase of these phenomena cannot be correlated with the maximum probability curves based on human nature . . . Kent, there is another force somewhere, powerful and dangerous because of its very subtlety, which is attempting to undermine humanity *from the inside.*"

And then there were Dr. Grange's remarks regarding flying saucers, before the Agarthian Council: "The hypothesis that this second order of matter might constitute the substance of the so-called ether and be the carrier medium for magnetic energy as well as other primary wave phenomena has now developed into strongly substantiated theory. In fact, sub-matter may be actual substance of the *next plane of existence* . . . The flying saucers are either the denizens of the sub-mate-

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rial world or they are a hybrid substance caught halfway between—the key, you might say, to the world of secondary phenomena . . . "

"I propose," said Gormski to the Council, "that we strike Mr. Kent's latest remarks from the records and that we dismiss Mr. Kent from this session of the Supreme Council. I propose further that we concern ourselves with examining the emergency as *we* know it and arrive at sober decisions affecting a practical method of defense."

The motion carried and Kent left. An uncontrolled rage filled him. The coming battle, he told himself, would teach them a lesson, if Earth survived at all!

* * *

THAT night in his hotel room he made use of his telepathic communicator that had been placed surgically inside his skull. Relayed through Agarthian augmenting equipment, his call reached Yvonne, his sister, who kept a lonely vigil in Germain's own laboratory citadel on Guam.

How is Lillian? he asked, referring to Germain's wife.

Michael! came Yvonne's augmented thought. *You never brought her!*

Are you crazy? I was just with you yesterday, and I left her there!

No, Michael. Germain communicated with me. He thinks you were possessed by an alien intelligence and were given a false memory of what you did. Lillian is gone! Germain made me use her direction finder and it located her—until an alien screen blocked it.

Sweat beaded suddenly on Kent's forehead. *Where is she?* he telepathed.

Somewhere in space. She has been kidnapped by the enemy! Germain has gone after her in the Nova. *Michael, I'm scared. Why don't you come here?*

What have you got to be scared of, Yvonne? In that place you're safer than anyone else on Earth. That lab's lousy with Elder Race gear—the genuine stuff!

That's just it! Germain made me activate some of it. He made me turn on the Chronoperceptor. It scares me, because when I read the mental instruction tapes here I gather that this Elder Race machine is building up some kind of "tertiary" field that's surrounding the entire planet. I gather what it's supposed to do, but I can't put it into words. Maybe there are no words for it. But it's too much responsibility to carry alone, Michael. I need help. Germain was angry when he had the Chronoperceptor turned on. He would not have risked it otherwise.

Kent reflected that the Elder Race equipment to which his sister referred was something which only Germain understood. This was the first time it had ever been activated, to his knowledge. Therefore, the

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lab on Guam could well be one of the most important cogs in this whole affair. Now that the Terrestrial Government Council had rejected him he had no further assignment for the time being.

I'll be there! he told Yvonne.

Besides, he thought, Lillian's and Germain's direction finders were both on Guam. Maybe he could help at that post more than at any other. And he remembered—Lillian had just announced to Germain a precious little secret concerning herself.

No wonder Germain was fighting mad!

* * *

ACROSS the world, on the outskirts of Irkutsk, lay a round, gray shape a quarter mile in diameter and three hundred feet thick. It was Nicholas' flag ship, a Nrlanian vessel built by robots and Gdjinhji slaves in the subterranean work cities of Mars. From it had marched that army of telepathic robots which had since turned Irkutsk into an industrial slave city. In many Russian cities, from Baku to Kharkov, other Nrlanian vessels rested, and robots worked tirelessly, all under the control of Nicholas the First. But what bothered Nicholas and his chief aide, Dr. Gerhardt Eidelmann, was the fact that the control they maintained over these robots and ships as well as the balance of the Nrlanian fleet hanging above them in outer space was theirs only by the sufferance of their allies, the Nrlani, who lurked somewhere between Earth and Mars in their floating city and worked through their hidden Central Control.

Near the space warship at Irkutsk was a villa, in the basement of which was a laboratory guarded by robots. Here Nicholas and Eidelmann, dressed in hooded, black radiation garments, were ready to draw an ace card out of their sleeves . . .

"Just give me another ten minutes," said Eidelmann, "and the power banks will be sufficiently charged to jam the Nrlanian beams."

He peered through thick eyeglasses at a fifty foot power panel fed by Universal Power. Nicholas paced the floor.

"I don't see how we can fail," he said, his gray eyes gleaming in anticipation of this new acquisition of power. "In a few minutes the complete control of the local Nrlanian fleet and all its robots will be cut off from Nrlanian Central! And if the remainder of the Nrlanian ships approach us as near as the orbit of the moon we'll control them, too! They will be ours! Think of it, Gerhardt! Even the Nrlani will be helpless! It's like—like cutting off their arms!"

His face clouded. He remembered having looked upon a Nrlanian once. Izdran of a Thousand Lives. And he thought: What the devil

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would a thing like *that* need arms for? He had never told Eidelmann about it. Pavlovich and Trinha Llih, the Martian girl, had also beheld Izdran in his true form. None of them had ever brought the subject up again. It wasn't something a human being would care to talk about. The Nrlanians were anathema to human life. He shuddered.

"Hurry it up," he grumbled, darkly.

On the side of the lab opposite the new power panels were banks of relay controls and several televiewers. On one of the screens was a scene of destruction in outer space, relayed to him by his flagship. As another Terrestrial Government ship blasted into nothingness before the onslaught of the activated robot flotilla, he smiled mirthlessly.

"The imbeciles! They can't touch our screens! It's like shooting fish in a barrel. They haven't the slightest knowledge of second order energy. In a few hours the Terrestrial Government fleet will be nothing but cosmic dust!"

"I wish I could say the same for the Agarthians, the Lunar Interstellars and the Golden Guardsmen—not to mention Borg and Germain," put in Eidelmann, still watching his meters.

"They do not possess second order equipment, either," retorted Nicholas. "Hurry it up, will you?"

"Look!" said Eidelmann. "The banks are charged! When I throw the switch on the transmitter here the Nrlanian bands will be jammed!" He threw the switch and a soundless, tingling vibration filled the room. "Now here goes our key carrier locking the robots to their new Central Control." He threw in another switch. "They are yours, Nicholas!"

"No they aren't. I'll take them!" The two men whirled around. "Hands in the air, Nick!"

IT was Pavlovich, and behind him was Trinha Llih, smiling at Nicholas with her ice cold Martian smile, her eyes blazing triumph. Pavlovich carried in one hand a regulation radium pistol, and in the other a Nrlanian dis-gun with which he had dispatched the robot guards.

"Sergeyev!" shouted Nicholas, scowling at him. "Don't be insane!"

Pavlovich grinned sardonically, his fat brows closing in on the wart between his eyes. "I've never been saner in my life!" he answered. "Get your arms up!"

As Nicholas and Eidelmann slowly raised their arms, they both took a deep breath. Without knowing why, Trinha breathed deeply also, as though guided by an alert instinct.

In the next instant, the two men's armpits seemed to explode. A black smudge filled the room even as Pavlovich fired his radium pistol. Then he fell forward, coughing violently.

As two dark figures hurried

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toward them, Trinha, still holding her breath easily because of the oxygen rich terrestrial air she had taken in, snatched up Pavlovich's weapon and fired it again. The resultant explosion dropped one figure to the floor, and the other staggered, falling into a corner.

Not knowing what she was doing, she groped her way along the control panels and flipped a toggle switch, whereupon the ventilating system whirred into greater activity, clearing the air, and she dared to take a breath.

When visibility was good again, she saw the inert body of Eidelmann on the floor in the center of the room. Pavlovich shook his head and struggled to his knees. They both looked at Nicholas.

Blood ran from his nose and ears as a result of the side blast from the radium bullet's explosion. Slowly, his wits were returning. He began to be aware of what he was looking at.

As Trinha lifted the robot control headpiece from its rack and put it on her head, Nicholas reached for his gun, and Pavlovich made a dive for him. Nicholas' knee came up and caught him in the throat. He rolled to one side, stunned. And Nicholas drew his gun.

Then he froze, staring.

In the doorway stood a telepathic robot, its center eye glowing. Nicholas knew what that glow meant.

"No!" he shouted, suddenly paling.

He aimed at the robot and fired.

The blast inactivated it and made it fall with a crash, but three more stepped over it. They walked toward Nicholas. He sweated, fired again, damaged two of them.

Then two more appeared. Nicholas tried to fire again but found difficulty in using his arms. The mental paralysis was setting in.

"No!" he screamed. There was a steel door behind him. He managed to turn and blast it open, and then he stumbled through the opening.

Pavlovich sat up again, staring at the robots, the blasted exit door, and at Trinha, who still wore her control headpiece.

"Send them after him!" he yelled. "He'll get away!"

Trinha removed the headpiece. "Let him go," she said. "What can he do now? This is the new Central Control."

Pavlovich rushed toward her. "Give me that headpiece, you fool!"

She thrust it behind her, her chin up and eyes blazing. "Leave Nicholas alone," she said. "You do what you want with the robots and the fleet. I've helped you. My reward is having Nicholas live to taste his defeat."

"But he's still got his agents!"

"They can do nothing! You have power over the Earth!" Temptingly, she finally held the headpiece toward him.

Pavlovich paused, eyes suddenly gleaming as he looked at it. *"Da,"*

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he said, lapsing from Martian into Russian. He brushed a mop of hair off his forehead. *"Da!* Give it to me! I'll take charge from here!"

As he concentrated on his new toy, Trinha started to make an exit. At the door of the lab she turned to look back at Pavlovich, who was now oblivious of her.

"Da!" she said, mockingly. *"You* take over!". And with that she left him.

* * *

BUT there was Eidelmann's special ship, which was not robot controlled, and of which Pavlovich knew nothing. While the latter played empire, Nicholas rounded up Eidelmann's top aides in the control room.

"Eidelmann is dead," he told them. "Pavlovich now has control of the robots and the fleet. But we're not finished yet!"

The way he stared each man down they could believe him. "I believe we have one bargaining point left to us."

"And that is?" Dr. Reinsch, tall, lean, with a wiry, white crop of hair, was Eidelmann's chief nuclear physicist—had been in the old days of the Nazi new underground movement when Eidelmann had played with Elder Race machinery.

"You know what I'm talking about," replied Nicholas, "because you are now the greatest living authority on the subject. You helped Eidelmann build the first Zero Bomb."

Reinsch's face clouded over. "Of course," he said. "Even today the sub-assemblies of that bomb exist, and I could put them together, but —it is not a useable weapon. It requires—"

"Forget the refinements! If the bomb will work—"

"But you don't understand. In its present form, if it were detonated, it would start a progressive chain reaction in stable matter, destroying the entire planet in a small fraction of a second!"

"Precisely! And that's what we will do," said Nicholas.

"What? Destroy the Earth?" Reinsch's brows went up, eyes wide in amazement.

Nicholas' gray eyes blazed. "If Earth will not surrender, including Pavlovich and his forces and all the forces and allies of Agarthi—I will destroy it! The Zero Bomb you will assemble immediately. You will also connect its detonating mechanism with a slow timer set to trigger the bomb within one hundred hours. Controlling the timer I want a VHF receiver with traps on it to receive only my own secret frequency transmitted from the flagship here at Irkutsk. I want remote control over that bomb no matter where I am in the solar system. Once everything is set, I'll issue my ultimatum demanding complete capitulation of everybody or I'll neglect to reset the timer and the Earth can go up

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in smoke!"

"You're a madman!" retorted Reinsch, his face livid with rage and disgust. "I can't place in your hands the power to destroy the Earth! No man could be entrusted—"

For answer, Nicholas calmly shot and killed every man in the room —except Reinsch. As the latter stood there sweating, Nicholas trained the pistol on him.

"It is not a question of trust," he said, quietly. "It is a matter of obedience. You will do precisely and only what you are told to do. Now where are those sub-assemblies for the Zero Bomb? I'll give you exactly three astronomically timed seconds to start talking!"

Reinsch looked at the bodies lying on the floor. Many of them had been close colleagues. He had just had dinner with two of them.

At the crisp count of two, he started talking . . .

* * *

"WHAT slobbering idiots!" raved Rocky. "That's the trouble with not getting better organized in time. Who gave the Terrestrial Fleet the order to attack?"

Stierman, heavy set, powerful, dark-complected, only stared gravely into the televiewer. He and Brion and Turner, all flight commanders attached to the Golden Guardsman fleet, had come to Rocky's flagship for a quick, personal conference on strategy. Their position was by now closer in to Mars than to Terra.

But down there between Luna and Terra they could see the catastrophe develop. Janice, in spite of her hard training, could hardly suppress tears of consternation.

"It's massacre!" she said. "The Terrestrial Government Fleet is lost!"

Rocky held his red-thatched head between two, ham-like hands. "Ye gods!" he moaned. "Let's hope the Agarthians know better! Those robots pack too much stuff! We've got to complete our secondary projectors before we can hope to break their screens. How soon will the project be finished, Janice?"

"We'll be within range of Martian war rays, if any, before they'll be ready," she answered. "The Agarthian Fleet and the Lunars are deployed all over space between here and Terra, also converting to secondary projection."

"What's the latest from Borg and Germain?"

"Nobody knows where the *Nova* is," put in Brion. "I don't blame Germain for not telling us his position. If anybody would have second order screens by now, he would, and if he's invisible to the enemy, why spoil the advantage?"

"Borg and Grange have contacted the Lunars and they relayed the message on the coda-beam," added Janice. "They have found out a lot about the flying discs. They are creatures that live in space, and

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they are dangerous. They are definitely connected with the enemy."

"That's a big help," commented Rocky. "What are we supposed to do about it? Nothing we've got will touch the critters because they are better than the old soldier. They don't just fade away. They fade *out*, completely. And we can't outfly them when they become nothing. But what harm can they do, actually?"

Stierman said, "Borg has intimated they may be the Sunday Punch, held in reserve. We don't know what they can do—yet."

"So what's the immediate plot?" queried Turner.

Rocky told him. "The only thing we can do, until we're *really* ready, is to approach Mars and very gingerly probe its defenses."

Stierman raised a pair of thick eyebrows. "Fortress Mars may not be on Mars at all," he suggested.

"*That* we've got to find out," said Rocky. "So back to your ships. And remember, we're scouting, not attacking. Don't be like those Terrestrial Government monkeys. I'll break the neck of the first officer who tries to show our big right arm!"

Which might have been a questionable threat, inasmuch as "Iron Man" Stierman had broken a few muscular necks, himself, having been Terra's leading exponent of judo, plus a few other manly arts. Brion and Turner were also very big time professional trouble deflaters. But on the other hand they respected Rocky's threat for two reasons. First, he was their commanding officer and a regular Joe.

Secondly, he was six feet six inches in height and weighed two hundred and sixty pounds. They had seen him manhandle hardy thugs as though he had been playing ping pong. It was not for nothing that Agarthi had gone out of its way to adopt big, fun loving, fight loving Steve Rockner to handle ten thousand of Terra's most capable fighting men —most of them battle experienced commandos and pilots from World War Three who had flocked to Agarthi from all over the world in response to Michael Kent's recruiting efforts.

"But Steve!" exclaimed Janice. "Can't something be done for those poor things? They're simply being slaughtered!"

"Brother!" said Rocky, watching the televiewer. "They say Pride goeth before a fall, but this is a case of idiotic, boneheaded stubbornness going before the Diluvium! Agarthi *must* be taking over under the emergency. They'll order a retreat. If they don't, Terra's tin can space fleet will be destroyed, and the world will be in the hands of the enemy before we get back. Already half of Europe seems to be in the hands of Nicholas, according to Agarthi's relay-casts we got half an hour ago. He's on the march again. But we'll stop him, for one good reason."

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"And that is?" queried Stierman.

Rocky brought his big fist down on the chrome-molybdenum flange of the control panel. "We've *got* to, that's why!"

"Any additional orders?" queried Brion.

Rocky looked from Brion to Stierman to Turner. They all avoided his eyes and seemed to slump, mentally if not physically.

"All right!" he came near to yelling at them. "I suppose you think *I* like it! I know you'd rather be fighting than pussyfooting around out here, but orders—"

"Rocky," interrupted Stierman. His blocky, muscular hands rippled with tension, as though they would have been happy snapping a few vertabrae. "Put this on record as speaking out of turn, but I'm going to say it. As the erstwhile Chief of the FBI, I made a reputation with the underworld by one sure method. Fight one fire with two. Papers, reports and investigations had their place, but the main thing was *drive*. We didn't case a 'joint.' We barged in and tore it apart and found out what was in it. Right now one of our ships could take over the Earth. So with a hundred ships, we ought to be able to tear hell out of Mars and find out what's there without losing time. I suggest—"

Rocky was on his feet, pacing back and forth in front of them. "Listen! I have a hunch that when the green light comes through, you are going to get more than a bellyful. It's going to be more than you want. It's going to be big, final, decisive, involving Earth, Mars, the solar system — human civilization. So let's not go off half cocked! Damn it! It it weren't for the responsibility—if it were just us 'girls,' I'd like to go in if it was bare handed. You *know* that. So bear with me until that second order stuff is ready. Now get back to your ships. Densify and deploy widely. That way we'll be harder to detect, harder to hit, harder to hurt. And of course," he added, "turn on the invisibility. It's only first order stuff, but it may add to the enemy's confusion."

IT was difficult, as a matter of fact, for hidden enemy detectors to keep track of a great fleet of space ships that suddenly deployed out over thousands of cubic miles of empty space and then became miniature. Under the influence of Borg's relative densifiers, the electrostatic and magnetic nature of every electron and proton in every ship was altered, causing molecular structure to shrink, creating miniature dreadnaughts only ten feet in length.

At which point they also became suddenly invisible to light and all other primary radiations.

Such ships were hard to find, impenetrably dense, swift, dangerous. The enemy was more wary of them than it was of the vast Agarthian

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warships or the sleek, mysterious vessels of the Lunar Interstellars. But every possible movement of Terra's multiple forces was being watched. Almost every ship was registered in the depths of intricate, hidden machines—thanks to the flying discs.

All except one ship — a swiftly moving vessel indetectably enshrouded in second order invisibility—the *Nova* . . .

* * *

GERMAIN admired Ingaborg and David. He was glad they were both on board with him. Their quick, healthy nerves were what he needed most right now. Eyes glued to the second order detectors, their nimble fingers were poised for almost instantaneous action above controls that would flood the new generators with oceans of Universal Power and rotate the screen frequencies all over the spectrum so that nothing would have a chance to penetrate.

"It's too quiet," complained Ingaborg, almost in a whisper.

"That's natural," commented Germain, as he continued to tinker with a new second order instrument he had invented. A silver wire mesh helmet was attached to his head and to the instrument. "It's instinct. We're close under enemy guns, like a submarine at the bottom of an enemy harbor. If we weren't indetectable they'd probably blast us out of existence. So we're quiet."

"That's not why I'm quiet," put in David, never taking his eyes from the bank of meters and signal lights before him. "I'm speechless at the thought of this floating city out here in space. I thought the *Nova* was the biggest man-made object in the solar system, but this fortress stretches for miles! It's like a planetoid!"

"A deadly fortress of alien science which is inimical to human civilization," added Germain. "It may be *the* stronghold of the principal enemy."

"You mean—the robot masters?" This from Ingaborg.

"Yes."

"What is our next move?" asked David.

"That will depend on this instrument," Germain replied, suddenly grim again at the thought of Lillian.

"What is it?" asked Ingaborg.

"A psychic heterodyner."

"A what?"

"It works something like a signal generator, generating harmonics of normal human thought, and also it can receive such harmonics, or intermediate frequencies, all on the second order level. I'm trying to find the thought band on which these aliens operate—if any."

"What do you mean—if any?" asked Ingaborg.

"Maybe it's not thought at all, as we know it."

"What about Lillian? Do you

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think they've taken her here?"

Lights flared before Ingaborg and David and they tensed, watching the gyrating detector needles.

"I think they've found us," said Germain. "Change position and densify."

Swift fingers flew across the signal buttons and Agarthian engineers elsewhere on board moved to obey. The gigantic vessel leaped across two miles of space. And one minute later it was only twenty feet long.

"I've got to try my luck again," said Germain to Ingaborg and David. Since their *relative* sizes were the same, they could not see that they were now Lilliputians. They only knew it from experience. "Set the screens at one point seven two eight nine three six million megs."

After a few seconds, David said, "All set. Better act fast before they catch our frequency."

A light of triumph sprang into Germain's dark eyes. "I've got it!" he exclaimed.

If a pin had dropped it would have sounded like an I-beam. They could all hear each other breathing, and the ventilators hissed faintly. To know that primary and secondary invisibility as well as densification might not yet be enough to evade the tremendous enemy over their heads, that they might all be blotted out in the fraction of a second, and that one of their number—Germain—was for the first time tapping the very thoughts of inhuman intelligences that sought their lives, was almost too much for taut nerves.

Then Germain jumped as though he had been struck. He fell off his seat onto the deck, writhing, holding his temples, and the wire mesh helmet rolled from his head.

David sprang to his feet, but Germain held out his hand, waving him back. "Keep to the controls! Rotate the screens!" Ingaborg did this as he said it. "Full speed for Mars. Quick!"

Almost before he could draw another breath the operators astern had thrown on the power and the ship leaped away on its long journey.

"What happened?" came a logical question from David, back at the controls. "Are you all right?"

"I—I had to take a big chance," Germain grunted, as he pulled himself back into his chair. "They found me and let me have it—a psychic ray, on their own frequency. But I found that frequency, and I traced the source of their control. It's all recorded. In a minute I'll have all the coordinates and we'll know exactly where their Central Control is located. It is *not* in that flying city."

"What thoughts did you catch?" asked Ingaborg.

"All the thoughts of the enemy."

This time, Ingaborg looked away from her controls to stare at Germain.

"Yes, do you know how many

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there are?—the total number of the enemy, outside of the robots and this Central Control, whatever it is?"

David, too, looked at Germain to catch the answer.

"Seven intelligences. Nothing more."

"Seven!" This was from both of them.

"Yes. Seven members of a lost race of inhuman monstrosities. I gather that the Elder Race once destroyed their world, which is now marked by the asteroid belt. The whole key to their present power lies in their Central Control."

"And Lillian?"

"I say I caught all the thoughts of the enemy. I should have said I caught the *thoughts* of all the enemy, not *all* they were thinking. But I don't think Lil is in the city. Wait!"

He was bending over his invention. "The location of Central Control is—"

* * *

IN that moment, blackness struck them, along with vertigo. The thunders of a thousand Maelstroms smote their minds and they were vaguely aware of being buffeted about in space like a ship in a hurricane.

All but Germain. After the first second of shock he regained his special faculties and became sharply aware of the fact that the enemy had struck a very powerful blow.

Then his mind was assailed by Izdran. Germain's mental feathers ruffled instinctively and he sought to gain his full stature but was somehow weakened. He struggled with Izdran as though caught in the cloying webs of a dream.

He was aware of a monstrous, shadowy entity that laughed at him derisively while playing at spider and fly. However, when he realized that the other was merely trying to communicate with him he became receptive, struggling to remain alert for deception, like a lightly drugged panther.

Then came visual illusion—a coppery bowl of a sky over his head. Below, immeasurably distant, was a flat world spreading outward in all directions without horizons, its only feature being fire. Red and yellow flames, reaching hungrily upward as though from the surface of a titanic sun.

Germain stood on a bare, round disc fifty feet in diameter. The disc floated motionlessly in space, suspended between coppery sky and flaming world below. Not far distant was another disc supporting Sergeyev Pavlovich. Pavlovich did not see him. He was gazing over the edge of his disc platform at the fire below, and though there was no sensation of heat he sweated.

Pavlovich was also aware, as was Germain, of Izdran. The latter was simply a ball of light poised motionlessly above them.

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To Germain it meant that Izdran was duo-psychic, controlling two minds simultaneously, allowing Germain to be aware of Pavlovich but not enabling Pavlovich to see him.

Germain asserted himself slightly by creating the illusion of a comfortable chair for Izdran to see. He sat down in it and hurled the first thought:

I presume you are merely attempting to communicate. What has Pavlovich to do with all this?

Instantly, Izdran answered him by cutting him in on his communication with the Russian:

Pavlovich, you exult now in your possession of separate control over the robots and the fleet, as well as Universal Power—not realizing, of course, that through the medium of the Martian girl, Trinha Llih, I maneuvered it that way in order to deflate our erstwhile collaborator, Nicholas.

Germain had little time to wonder about this turn of affairs, because of Pavlovich's reply. The latter appeared to accept, at last, that his present environment was the product of illusion. He straightened up, regained some of his confidence, and Germain caught his sarcastic reply:

In that case you've given me what I want. Thanks very much! You thought you set a trap, but it seems I ate your fatted calf. The robots and the fleet are mine—and so is the Earth! You fumbled with the lynx, Izdran. Now beware of the tiger! You'll soon have Germain on your neck, or what you use for a neck, and I'm depending on the two of you to destroy each other and save me the trouble!

Suddenly, Pavlovich's disc platform became a mere open pattern of thin girders. Pavlovich yelled with fright and fell across a gap between them, clutching at them, trying to save himself from falling into the flames below. And Izdran calmly replied:

My dear Pavlovich—the sprawling, inefficient, destructive and parasitic form of life known as human shall be obliterated from the universe, and all Germain's delusions of high purpose and godliness in Man shall implode into cosmic dust to clear Creation for a new beginning. You are both mere mice squealing in the darkness of your own stupidity. Germain is even now feeling the weight of our greatest weapon, which nothing can resist, as is every space ship which Agarthi and Luna can muster against us, and your captured Nrlanian and Terrestrial Government vessels will also be useless if they emerge too far into space, as they would automatically meet with the same fate, becoming but lifeless derelicts, flotsam adrift in the grip of solar gravitation, ultimately becoming fuel for the fires of Sol. You have had your little try to best us and you have failed—all of you. We have use for you Terrestrials just as we have use for the Mar-

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tians, but only as a temporary front. If you continue to exist at all it will be merely to serve us, then be destroyed utterly. We are not asking you to surrender. That is completely immaterial. Whatever any of you may choose to do, your era is at an end.

Pavlovich scrambled to his feet, standing astride two girders, and he replied: *You sound like all this has gone to your head. You're crazy. Nobody could be that sure of himself.*

The lacework of girders thinned to half the previous number, and Pavlovich struggled again to maintain his footing.

Your era is at an end, telepathed Izdran, *even if we make no further effort to curb your present actions. If you disbelieve me, let me ask you a simple question: Do you know what happened to Nicholas?*

Germain tensed, sensing that all this was not mere propaganda. Before Pavlovich could reply, Izdran answered his own question:

Nicholas is in space flight, in a secret vessel built by Eidelmann. For my own amusement I have left him intact to get through to his goal. He carries remote controls which hold the power to destroy or save the Earth. Somewhere on your planet is a very deadly bomb—one that will propagate a chain reaction in stable matter and thus destroy your world instantly even as ours was destroyed by the Elder Race long ago. Soon you will hear from him, as will the remaining Agarthians on Earth. He will give you an ultimatum. If you and all the peoples of the Earth do not surrender, along with the Agarthians, Germain, the Lunar Interstellars and the so-called Golden Guardsmen, he will permit that bomb to detonate.

Germain received the relay of Pavlovich's startled thoughts: *Where is that bomb? We've got to deactivate it!*

Izdran's psychic laughter was not a pleasant experience. *This has become a very interesting little game, hasn't it? Now why should I spoil it at this stage? Nicholas has killed Dr. Reinsch, who was the only other living human who knew the bomb's location. Now only Nicholas knows. I could find out by tapping his mind, but I don't want to be tempted. Let him have his power piece. From where I sit, the game is loaded with very entertaining suspense—especially in view of the fact that when Nicholas gives his ultimatum I shall have the Agarthian ships, the Golden Guardsmen, the Lunar Interstellars and Germain and Borg all gagged so that they cannot reply even if they wish to submit. Mistaking their silence for defiance, he just may be megalomaniac enough to allow the bomb to explode.*

But Earth! came Pavlovich's frantic mental cry tinged with quaking fear. *Earth will be destroyed!*

Izdran's doubly relayed thought

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returned like a hammer blow, contemptuously: *What is the Earth to me or my kind? One puny obstacle to be brushed from our path—a dustmote lost in Infinity. It is quite expendable, so why not let Nicholas save us the trouble?*

At that moment, all the girders supporting Pavlovich dissolved and he plummeted, screaming, into the flames below. Germain knew that the Russian would wake up somewhere with a bad headache and the vivid memory of a nightmare.

He addressed Izdran: *Where is my wife, Lillian?*

Ah yes! The little mutant speaks! I thought I'd need her to play my game with Nicholas, but that is no longer necessary. She is alive and well, Germain. And I will tell you where she is, just to add interest to our little game. She lives now in the heart of Central Control. Now why don't you try to find her? Izdran laughed. *Or is the mutant afflicted with altruism? Would he rather find Nicholas first? The bomb, you should know, was set to detonate in one hundred hours unless Nicholas decides to change the settings through his remote controls. Where is Nicholas, Germain? The Earth has only hours to live. And where is Central Control? You think you know where it is. It would be amusing to see you try to reach it, or enter it. Only Martians can enter Central Control, Germain. Any other form of life would be destroyed. I'm going to make this an experiment. I'll give your wife just sufficient air to last her until the Zero Bomb detonates on Earth. When Earth dies, so does she. Now you can't very well serve two loves simultaneously, can you? Whom do you value more, oh hero, born of woman—the people of the Earth, or your wife? The board awaits you, Stephen Germain. It is your move!*

Rage filled Germain. He tore Izdran's disguise from him even as Izdran removed the disc platform from under his "chair." But Germain did not fall. He chose to remain exactly where he was, sitting in the chair, suspended in the center of Izdran's illusion.

He saw Izdran and his mind reeled. But there was no time to wonder about such an inconceivable form of life, a thing conceived on a basis foreign to human concept.

Izdran, he telepathed, *you and your six companions are going to die!*

The blazing globe was back, disguising Izdran again. And once more the Nrlanian laughed. *But the chess board, Germain! Have you forgotten the queen piece? And the black bishop—Nicholas? It is your move, Germain!*

* * *

TRINHA Llih finally mastered the controls of the televiewer and located Eidelmann's space ship. She had no way of interpreting the Doppler-principle triangulator in front of her, but she reasoned that

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Pavlovich's small Nrlanian flier was traveling many miles per second in the general direction of Mars.

She had traced Nicholas, after several days' secret investigation, only to see him take off in a hurry. As Pavlovich's hidden ship had been emptied of its robot crew, she had been able to steal it without fear of its coming under Pavlovich's Central Control. She dismissed the thought of possible pursuit by any of Pavlovich's robot controlled battleships, because she knew that such a move would lose the Russian a ship to the Nrlani once it emerged into the range of their own control. In the meantime, there was Nicholas to think about. His unexpected escape in an independently controlled space ship was not her idea of the kind of defeat she had planned for him.

"You know, Trinha, I think you and I have the same idea."

She turned, swiftly, reaching for her radium pistol, but not swiftly enough. A man's hand swept the weapon out of her reach, and she looked into the muzzle of her own weapon. Then she screamed.

"Eidelmann!"

He stood there glaring at her, smiling only with his mouth, as bald and myopic as ever, but unscarred. "When you saw me last," he said, "I was a shattered corpse."

"You were dead! *Dead!*" she exclaimed, brokenly, in the limited Russian she had been able to pick up while on Earth.

The other shrugged. *"That* Eidelmann *did* die," he answered. "But I am another Eidelmann."

Her eyes widened. Her hand went to her lips. She paled and drew away from him, her pulse roaring in her ears.

"It is a long and complicated story which you would not understand," he told her. "To make it short and simple, there was a machine, long ago, with which I experimented. It was not my invention. The Elder People built it. It was called a teletransporter. It transported physical objects by *broadcasting* them. Naturally, I experimented with the obvious. I built multiple receivers. With such an arrangement I once produced a multiple army for a new Nazi Germany — the famous *Doppelganger* troops — troops without number. In spite of that army, Agarthi succeeded in defeating us. All Elder Race equipment was taken from us, and those of us who survived were imprisoned. However, I was not entirely imprisoned. Not even Nicholas knew that I was, myself, a *Doppelganger!*..While he freed one of me, my second counterpart worked as an independent agent elsewhere, yet knowing everything that was happening to my other self. When the first Eidelmann was killed, it was a matter of logic for the second one to take over. Consequently, here I am! I followed you, because I correctly assumed you would know where this ship was concealed. And now it seems we

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have a common interest—to overtake Nicholas."

Trinha understood little of all this. Her practical mind was groping through the temporary chaos of her thoughts which had been wrought by the hurricane of fear that had broken upon her at sight of Eidelmann. But now she was reasoning that Eidelmann could be of help to her, ghost or demon though he might be, because he had good reason to be on the other's trail. That he might take over where Nicholas would leave off, in the event of the latter's ultimate defeat, was immaterial to her. The main objective was Nicholas.

"Take over," she told Eidelmann, finally. "Why should I argue?"

"That's more like it!" said the German scientist. "It would be quite unintelligent of us to act like two stubborn mules and pull against each other when we're both after the same stack of hay."

Trinha could not understand all he said, but she could understand the little dot of light that was centered on the screen of the televiewer. That was Nicholas' ship, and it was headed straight for her own planet. She could understand that she hated Nicholas. He had betrayed her people, herself, and her sacred dreams. Death was too good for him, but if all else failed—

* * *

"IZDRAN," said Prahl, accusingly, "you are cheating." He was looking at the same screen that occupied Izdran's attention. "You are letting the Martian girl and that resourceful German get through the barrier. They may be able to liquidate Nicholas if you don't turn the discs on them, and if Nicholas dies the Zero Bomb will be out of control."

Izdran might have laughed, but his seventh sense was bothering him. "The stakes in this game may have risen to vital proportions," he said. "I don't like the future picture. So I'm throwing an extra piece onto the board, but I'm letting it make its own moves. That's not exactly cheating. And what if I am? Are we becoming moralists at this late stage?"

Reflectively, Prahl replied, "It is, perhaps, later than we think. I don't like this game. It makes light of our objectives."

"On the contrary. If we can't rule Earth we might as well see it destroyed."

"But have you forgotten what else will be destroyed if Earth goes?"

"My friend, in *that* house there are many mansions . . . "

* * *

IN the next instant, Germain was aware of being back in the control room of the *Nova*. He would have discounted much of the illusion just experienced had he not possessed a seventh sense that warned him very definitely of total cata-

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clysm. In spite of his self control, a cold, nervous sweat beaded his face.

There was nothing to do but fight, so he said a prayer and set to work with every cell of his mutant brain.

He looked about him in the control room. The lights were out, but his extrasensory perception went exploring. There were Ingaborg and David, sprawled unconscious.

At first he thought they had struck their heads against something, but when his ESP carried his mental vision through the ship he realized that the entire crew was unconscious.

Then why not himself? For the first time he was aware of the terrible strain he was under just to remain conscious. Something seemed to be draining his mind of energy —the same mysterious force that had somehow affected all electrical conductors on board and deadened the Universal Power generators.

What had Izdran said to Pavlovich? —*Germain is even now feeling the weight of our greatest weapon, which nothing can resist, as is every space ship which Agarthi and Luna can muster against us.*

Did that mean—?

"No!" he exclaimed aloud, shaking his head to clear it of the terrible vision of almost three hundred ships scattered over millions of miles of the dark void—*lifeless derelicts, flotsam adrift in the grip of solar gravitation* — and of Earth in the grip of Pavlovich, only to be destined to destruction, or at least to slavery and eventual extinction at the hands of the robot masters.

And Lillian!

His mind leaped outward only to meet a restricting wall that dimmed his perception. It did not hinder him entirely, but it was hard to get through.

Carefully, he sought to discover the nature of that wall. It clung to the *Nova* like a mass of jelly, and he soon knew what it was. Simultaneously he knew what every other ship from Terra or Luna looked like at that moment.

A massed cluster of flying discs completely covering everything. Obedient to Nrlanian Central Control, they had penetrated even second order screens, and now they were exerting their mysterious powers in order to immobilize all resistance.

Again he tried to examine the peculiar creatures, and again he was confronted with an alien thing that seemed unfathomable. But now he suddenly became aware of features he had not detected before. The discs were all mental power, but passive unless controlled. They were lethal when activated by outside volition. And that outside volition was Central Control.

He felt his pulse increase as he envisioned this tremendous instrument lying in the hands of the Nrlani. By methods perhaps similar in principle to those Borg and Grange had used, they had trapped the discs for

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centuries and conditioned them to respond to Central Control. Wandering through space, they were very adequate extensions of the Nrlanian central brain—a cold, inhuman intelligence expanded to the size of a solar system! The thralldom of millenia of time in which Earth had lain secretly at the hands of malignant interstellar powers seemed insignificant when compared to the magnitude of this.

He shuddered and then made a new effort to concentrate.

If there was to be any chance of salvation, he had to get to Central Control. To the devil with Nicholas, for the time being. If he could get to Central Control and find a way of entering the place he could perhaps accomplish more than he could by choosing any other course of action, and at the same time he could rescue Lillian. As for the threat of the Zero Bomb, he was thankful Izdran had not been able to probe the secret depths of his mind. There were a few hidden pieces which he, himself, had installed on Izdran's treacherous chess board!

In the meantime, he had to act fast. If he remained a prisoner inside the *Nova* he would soon succumb to the terrible, draining force being exerted upon him by the discs.

WITH an alarmingly difficult physical effort, he staggered through the companionway and along A-deck toward the lifeboats. Then he came to a stop and shook his head. What was he doing? Leaving Ingaborg and David?

For a moment he thought clearly again. Yes, he was leaving them—and all the crew—to rescue them later if there was still time, or to leave them to their fate if there was not. He could not consider himself, or his friends, or even Lillian.

That was the hell of being a straw god. More and more people depended on you. People? No—worlds, a solar system!

And here he was staggering around in the pitch dark—

But dammit! No use trying the commuter boats. They'd be as dead as anything else.

Yet he had to get out. *Had* to!

He staggered on again, his ESP dimming at times so much that he had to grope through the dark with his hands.

Toward the space suits and the airlock. If he could just bail out of the ship and get free of those damned discs, he might be able to think—maybe reach somebody, or even effect an astral projection—anything rather than lie down now.

He reached the suits and got into one of them. The air valves worked because they were mechanical rather than electrical. That was something, at least.

But when he tried to activate the ship's airlocks to go outside he realized that the pneumatic devices in-

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side were dependent upon electrical valve trips.

No action. The ponderous doors of the lock might as well have been a mile thick. He couldn't get out.

He fell to his knees, his space mitts scraping down the apathetic metal before him, and his deepest instinct brought to his lips a single faint cry of remorse.

"Lil, honey! Lil!"

Then he paused, suddenly rigid. In his mind was a picture of himself in the palace at Agarthi, trapped by Pavlovich's robot images.

Autoportation!

He lay down on his back and assembled his thoughts, knowing that even if he succeeded he would die unless he could include the spacesuit, as well.

Calm now, he thought. Every muscle relaxed. Heart slower, breathing diminished.

There. Now build the faith image. Myself, in this suit, outside, a mile away—probably as far as I can project—looking back at the *Nova*. Get it clear, clear — *clear* . . . Ready, relax—!

In the next instant he was aware of the cold hissing of oxygen from his tanks, a very conspicuous sound when one is falling free in interplanetary space.

Falling swiftly, that is, toward the surface of a planet.

Approximately five thousand miles below he beheld the mottled pale green and red topography of Mars, toward which he was hurtling at an indeterminate speed. He knew that the inverse square law was not working to his advantage as he fell ever deeper into the field of the planet's gravitational influence. Then, too, there was the *Nova* with its helpless human cargo. In a matter of hours it would dig its grave beside his own down there.

Unless he could do something . . .

* * *

FAINTLY, the message was received, first on one band, then on another. Operators in all parts of the world began to notify their respective regional governments. The regional headquarters, in turn, appealed to the Terrestrial Government Council at Lake Success. It was Nicholas' ultimatum.

Ironically, Gormski was chairman at the time and it devolved upon him to read it to the Council:

"Furthermore," the ultimatum concluded, "unless an answer is received from Terrestrial Government, from Pavlovich's provisional occupation government, from Agarthi, from the Lunar Interstellars, from the Golden Guardsman Fleet and from Germain, himself, within the next twelve hours—Earth will cease to exist . . . "

Gormski's usually pasty complexion was ruddy just now, and he stared at his audience through his bifocals, defensively. "This is followed by some technical data," he mumbled, "concerning the wavelength

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to use in communicating with Nicholas. He is on Mars."

Council members were on their feet, shouting, and Gormski was pounding the gavel for order.

"If you had not opposed the acceptance of the Agarthian Charter and its Emergency Clause—" began some of the accusations, directed at Gormski.

But he was prepared for this. "One way or another," he said to them, "the same effect has been achieved. Germain and his forces have set out to defend us exactly as he would have had we accepted the Charter in the first place, yet we are still at an impasse. The Terrestrial Government Fleet has been half destroyed, and the other half has been captured. Half of all Eurasia is under the dominance of Nicholas' invading forces, now headed by this Pavlovich. Agarthi itself stands at bay, and we hear nothing of our saviors who sought to form a chastity belt across the stars against the ravishment we were warned to expect. I say we should contact Agarthi and Pavlovich simultaneously and concur on this matter, inasmuch as our destinies appear to have reached a common denominator."

Gormski had early been indoctrinated with an old political principle: "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em!" A second principle provided for a two-faced attitude, so that one face could be saved merely by presenting the other to view.

"Particularly," he added, "we must contact this Pavlovich to determine whether or not we should consider this new threat as the outburst of another Carpet Eater or as something to be taken seriously. Since it is apparent that Pavlovich has muscled in on Nicholas' territory and the two are at desperate odds, Pavlovich would not be willing to surrender along with the rest of us unless he knew for a fact that the ultimatum could be made good. Agarthi's opinion in this might also be valuable, and their facilities might be more capable of communicating with Nicholas than any that we now have at our disposal."

Thus, by attracting the Council's attention to these new considerations, Gormski simultaneously provided himself with a loophole for past errors and acquired new stature as a leader. Secretly, however, he conceded that Germain had been sincere, as well as Michael Kent. He wondered where they both were at that moment . . .

AGARTHI and Terrestrial Government appealed to Pavlovich simultaneously for an opinion, and it was soon forthcoming.

"The Zero Bomb exists," his message read. "I have already transmitted to Nicholas my own message of surrender. He has replied that he is not as much concerned with our capitulation as with Germain's and that of the Golden Guardsmen. As yet they have not

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replied, and he gives us all just six more hours."

Terrestrial Government representatives stormed the gates of Agarthi in person, including Gormski. But to all their pleas and inquiries and demands, Mandir made the same reply.

"If Germain and the Guardsmen, together with their allies, the Lunar Interstellars, can do nothing, then nothing remains to be done . . . "

Churches, shrines and hilltops began to overflow with praying and wailing multitudes. There was less wailing and praying at liquor bars, however, because many a proprietor was giving out free drinks.

Towers, steeples and buildings supporting large clocks came into prominence as millions of people watched what might be the last hours of existence dribble inexorably away into nothingness . . .

* * *

THE second terrestrial vessel to acquire second order screens was the laboratory ship carrying Dr. Grange and Dr. Borg, together with their small crew of Agarthian specialists. Painstakingly, under a cover of second order invisibility, they had combed the void for signs of the discs, ceaselessly making adjustments on their giant trap and simultaneously watching all fleet movements as well as they could.

It was not until the Nrlanians struck, however, that they began to discover what they were after. When they witnessed the envelopment of several Lunar vessels by the flying discs, they moved into action.

"The discs may be able to penetrate our screens, too," commented Grange. "Which means that we had better capture one and see what makes it tick before it is too late."

"I have made one concrete observation," said Dr. Borg. "The reason we did not see discs out here until now is that they were all too highly attenuated. Now they have densified into our own plane."

Just then, the alarm rang on the trap, and they rushed to see what they had caught. Donning lead-lined suits, they admitted themselves into the antechamber from which they could observe, through glass panels, the atomic pile and multiple cyclotron apparatus that formed the trap. There were second order controls which they now manipulated in order to wrap a triple screen around their prisoner.

They could see the disc through the panels. It floated above the cyclotrons and pulsed with light and colors, as though struggling to get free. Beside Borg, several types of special motion picture cameras were whirring automatically, as were spectrographic and electronic analyzers and stroboscopic floodlights of various types.

Before either scientist could congratulate the other, however, the disc merely attenuated until it was

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mist, then nothingness.

"You see!" said Borg, through the radiophone in the helmet of his suit. "I tell you they can travel from one plane to another! Grange, I think I know the answer!"

"You'd better have an answer quick," replied Grange. "The discs will soon overtake us like they are overtaking the fleet."

"We are equipped with the relative densifier," continued Borg. "Why don't we reverse its field action and instead of densifying—*attenuate*! Maybe we could—"

"Borg! You've hit it! That would enable us—"

"To follow the discs to their source and find out a lot of other things—maybe even stumble upon the home stamping grounds of the principal enemy!"

At that moment, signal lights in the ante chamber caused them to get back into the main body of the space ship. An Agarthian captain was impatient to communicate with them.

"The differential analyzer readings have been relayed from Agarthi," he said. "Nrlanian Central Control is definitely located on the Martian moon, Deimos . . . "

* * *

"WHAT in Purple Blazes is coming off around here!" shouted Rocky.

"What's the matter?" asked Janice. She had just come back from a tour of the battle stations and her coppery hair was loose, framing her pale, smudged face in a ruddy halo.

Rocky looked at her. "Don't interrupt me at a time like this!" he pleaded.

Her hands went to her hips and her chin went up. "I *beg* your pardon!"

"Oh you know what I mean! When I'm trying to figure something out and my think-gadget is plugging away on all two cylinders and you come walking in with your assets showing I blow a gasket and lose my bearings. I'd call *that* an interruption!"

She knew he was trying to be sweet, but the strained look on his face told her this was no time for play. She came and leaned over him, with her arms around his neck.

"What's old think-pot worried about?" she asked, casually glancing at the instrument panel before him. Not that she took their present situation lightly. She had merely made a habit of keeping up the local morale.

"Think with me, honey," he said, "and fast! All hell's breaking loose! My indicators on the other fleet units are blacking out all over the place. The enemy just *can't* be knocking them off like that, Janice, unless this is the end of the universe or something!"

"What do you mean? Let me see." Immediately she became the trained scientist again, her keen eyes analyzing the indicators.

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"Discount the Terrestrial Government Fleet." he said. "What didn't get fried is cooked. All captured by Nicholas. But the Agarthian fleet consisted of twenty-five supers, the Lunar Fleet started out with a hundred and sixty, and there's our own outfit with a full hundred ships, not counting the *Nova* and Borg's special job. So you read the board and figure it out!"

Janice was reading the board—and growing pale.

"Good Lord, Steve! The blue signals are on the Agarthian band, aren't they?"

"Right!" Rocky was sweating. "Read 'em!"

"Only ten left, Rocky! And the red signals!—you can see them go out! The Lunar Interstellars are blacking out about one every ten seconds! It *can't* be right!" She reached for the intercom switch, but he stayed her hand.

"I've checked Electronics," he said. "We're metering perfict. No, Janice, something big and very unfunny is chopping us down all over space. Wait—here's Stierman calling in. Maybe he's got something. Go ahead, Greg!"

Stierman's dark-browed visage flickered strangely on the visiscreen, as though they were looking at him through water.

"Well?" he said. "What's your idea—or are we going to be sitting ducks?"

"I thought *you* had an idea," said Rocky.

"I have," replied Stierman. "This is their big weapon—and that may mean—"

"The discs!" ejaculated Janice.

"You're right," said Stierman. "They're doing something we can't understand. You can see what's happening to the ether by our warped reception. Such forces may really be able to cripple us. We've got to act—but what's the plan?"

"Steve, may I take the floor?" Janice requested.

"Beautiful, if you've got an idea, take a couple of decks and all the bulkheads! We're listening!"

"Whatever it is that's knocking out those ships, it's not localized. Its effect is too widespread. And if you'll note the other fleets' positions on your tri-coordinates you'll see that it's sweeping our way like a tidal wave. We have the slim advantage of having been forewarned. Not knowing what may work nor having time to investigate, I suggest three plans of action to be tried simultaneously by three sections of our own fleet. One plan might have a chance and at least a third of us would come through."

"Don't stop now," said Rocky.

Stierman's face was inscrutable as he watched her on his own screen.

"Plan One," she said. "First group full speed to Mars and land. Maybe this stuff operates best out here and you'd be safer on the ground, even if this plan precipitates an engagement with Martian forces.

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At least those forces will be physical and not composed of flying discs. On all our own ships, the second order screens are practically in the testing stages, and I think Group One could complete their conversions even under battle conditions and have a chance to survive — *if* the discs aren't operating on the planet, proper. Plan Two: Second group densify to maximum smallness and make a run for it—maximum survival acceleration. Maybe density will do the trick and high velocity will help. The density may reduce the surface areas of the ships and not give the discs enough to work on to be effective. Plan Three: Third group also densify, but remain stationary and bail out in the commuters. In the small boats you may be able to hide out and come back later to see what happened to the ships, themselves. I've got a hunch every ship in each of the fleets is tickling a signal light somewhere on an enemy control board, but a sudden plethora of small commuters would confuse the issue—and the discs aren't miraculous. They can't be everywhere. What do you think?"

"Sweetheart," said Rocky, "you just made a sale! It's good! I'll buy it! What do you say, Greg?"

The shadow of a grim smile tugged at the corners of Stierman's mouth as he looked at Janice approvingly. "It's good," he answered, "provided I can lead Group One. My second order screens have just checked out. I'm ready for Fortress Mars."

Rocky barked orders at his recorder. "Plan One: Ships 101 through 133." Number 101 was Stierman, and Rocky grinned at him as he said it. "Plan Two: Ships 134 through 167. Plan Three: 168 through 200."

"But what about 100?" asked Stierman. "That's you."

"We're going to be real fancy," said Rocky. "I've just been listening to some relay data out of Agarthi. If anybody gets a chance, look us up on Deimos." Deliberately, he snapped Stierman off. And in the next instant he put the recording of their decision on inter-ship coded broadcast, preceded by the call signal identifying official orders. Then he turned to Janice.

"Sweetheart—get some of the boys together and rig me *direct* controls on one of those remote controlled U. P. bombs. Don't ask why. No time. Get!" Whereupon he spanked her where only prerogatives dare to land. And she got.

"Electronics!" he barked into the inter-com. "Bring us up to normal density!" He switched to Navigation. "Lunar ship seventy-two is closest to us and still intact, but it won't be intact in about another couple of minutes. Watch it in the visiscopes and tell me what hit it. I'll be in Locker A. *Janice!*"

She had paused to hear his orders, somewhat puzzled. "Meet me in Locker A," he told her. "We're in

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this for better or for worse, aren't we?"

Her blue green eyes tried to probe his. "Yes, Steve, but—"

He sprang to his feet and led her out. "No time for buts. Let's go! I want those direct controls on a U. P. bomb. Better weld on a couple of cargo rings. Work like lightning. No time to talk! See you!"

He left her, taking the ramp below toward Locker A, where the special Golden Guardsman space suits were stored.

HE had just climbed into a suit when Navigation reported.

"It's the flying discs, sir," said the Navigator. "Completely engulfed the ship. Lost communication within thirty seconds. Their power just faded out."

"Thanks," said Rocky into his space phone. "We'll get it ourselves in about thirty minutes, maybe less. Before that I'll give Electronics the signal for densification. By that time I'll be outside on a U. P. bomb and you'll be on your own, but at maximum density you'll have such a reduced hull area that the discs may not be able to be entirely effective. You'll have Universal Power and you may still be able to hobble along. Follow us to Deimos if you can."

"*Us*—sir?"

"Yes. My wife will be with me."

"But—surely you're not going to—"

"No, no suicide run, but a U. P. bomb is the fastest thing we've ever produced. We might outrun the discs and get to the source of trouble on Deimos. Of course, if worse comes to worst—"

"Yes?"

"No time to talk now. Let's get a move on!"

Within twenty-five minutes, Janice met Rocky in Locker A. He had been outlining a plan of action to all sections on board, but when she came in he cut it short and handed her a suit.

"In you go!" he said. "Is our chariot ready?"

Her eyes told him she knew what he was planning. "Yes, Rocky, it's ready. And I love you for including us both. So much more wonderful and big of you than trying to be a hero by yourself and leaving little wifey behind."

"Heck, you'll be safer out on that bomb than here in a minute or two. Let's go!"

"For luck, honey!" She kissed him.

He grinned, then clapped her helmet on her. When she saw him next, through her face plate, he was not grinning. He was pulling her in frantic haste toward the bomb chutes.

"When we get on the bomb, we'll densify and be small enough to go through the chute with it. Then I'll signal the ship to densify."

"It may seem strange to think of it at this time, but I wonder where

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Germain is?" said Janice.

"No time to wonder. He's a superman and I think he can take care of himself, but if you and I are going to survive we'll have to be more primitive about it and struggle like hell. Now come on!"

* * *

GERMAIN soon noticed that his fall toward Mars, as well as that of the *Nova,* was swiftly developing into a lateral drift, and he wondered if he and the ship were to become satellites. As he drew to within a thousand miles of the planet's surface his ESP leaped downward in exploration.

He was aware of the crystal ridges that brought water from the poles by osmosis. In fact, he could make out a few with the naked eye, or at least their general direction, because of the belts of vegetation that followed them in most places. He wondered if the ridges were a result of natural geographical formation or actual intent by the Martians or long-forgotten ancestors who had dabbled in a science unknown to modern physics. Certainly the crystal ridges were more practical than the supposed canals, which would have presented too much water surface for evaporation under conditions of light gravitation and thin, dry atmosphere.

He was intrigued by various ancient ruins which he perceived only by means of his ESP. In many places he detected clusters of pyramids. They stood in pairs, always a large one with a smaller one beside it. Perhaps the Martians were moon worshippers, or their ancestors had been, he mused. A large pyramid for the larger appearing moon, Phobos, and a smaller one for the more distant moon, Deimos.

Strange, he thought, that out here he should be indulging in comparative archaeology and ethnology. But the thought persisted that on Earth there were also pyramids and that in the distant past there had been both moon and sun worshipping pyramid builders. He remembered the persistent custom among Western Hemisphere Indian cultures of using the two horn symbol, or the two feather symbol, for the legendary "Twin Stars." The Apaches, the Incas—

But what was happening to him? Was he getting feeble minded out here in space? Worlds were at stake and he was wool gathering!

He forced his mind to alert objectivity and probed Mars with more practical intent. His sensory projection was able to penetrate through underground robot defenses and see the bustling slave cities, now converted into fortresses and space ship hangars, largely manned by mentally conditioned Martians. One glance told him that here were the factories and arsenals of Mars, but for the Nrlani this was *not* their own front line of offense and defense. That would be Deimos and

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Central Control—or would it?

Suddenly, he was aware of a distant fleet of thirty-four ships skimming with lightning rapidity over the surface of Mars, and he could swear they were Golden Guardsman vessels. In the next instant he was sure of it, because Martian defenses fired on them and closed their screens, and many a Nrlanian warship, manned by robots, emerged from subterranean hangars to engage in combat with them. He knew, simultaneously, that these particular Guardsman ships had secondary screens, and he breathed a vast sigh of relief. Now they could operate!—at least against Fortress Mars. They were fast, versatile, powerful and deadly, even against Nrlanian ships, as was soon made evident by the successful blows he began to witness. Good for Rocky! That was one way of killing two birds with one stone—escape the discs by attacking Mars, itself. But where were the other contingents of the fleet?

He probed space telepathically. If some ships were out here and had survived the disc attack he would implant in the minds of their crews the command to pick him up and try to rescue the *Nova*, which was now definitely caught in an orbit.

Suddenly, something flashed past him but was lost to sight in the maze of blazing stars that formed the firmament like a jagged wall of coral at the bottom of an endless sea. It might have been a meteor—but he knew that it was not.

He also knew that it was coming back toward him. Soon he could see it again, and his worst suspicion was confirmed.

A flying disc . . .

* * *

NEITHER Nicholas nor Trinha Llih nor Eidelmann were aware of the *Chess Player* as their two ships maneuvered in toward Mars through robot detector screens unscathed. Nicholas was so intent upon his preparations for the ultimatum that he had failed to detect his pursuer, and so he landed his ship, near a large Gdjinhji trading city where five crystal ridges converged among at least a hundred pairs of ancient pyramids. Knowing Mars as he did, he knew he had little to fear from a surface town, and as he had come with few personal provisions he had an idea that he would have to avail himself of the town's facilities. Aside from this, there was a much more vital consideration . . .

Trinha knew that town. It was Zridhn Nor. She told Eidelmann about it and explained to him what Nicholas already knew—that it was the subterranean cities they had to stay clear of. The surface ones were relatively harmless. Zridhn Nor was situated at that point on the planet's surface where night was beginning to descend, so under cover of approaching darkness they moved in behind the outlying pyramids at

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a point opposite the side of the town where Nicholas had landed, and where Nicholas, at that moment, was hurling his ultimatum at the Earth.

The populace, large at this particular season, had been attracted by the sight of the large terrestrial space ship built on Nrlanian lines, and their smaller vessel had apparently gone unnoticed. It was then they remembered that they had turned on their invisibility hours before.

"I have a plan," Trinha told Eidelmann. "You would be very conspicuous, but I would not. These are my people. I know their customs and speak their language. You want your own ship and you want Nicholas out of the way. What I want is Nicholas, himself. He's up to no good, and if we leave him alone he may accomplish what he's after. I intend to stop him. He would not have landed near the city if he did not intend to enter it for some reason. When he leaves the ship, I'll be there. If you distrust me, you can watch me in the televiewer."

Eidelmann handed her the radium pistol. "I'll work with you on that plan," he said. "But don't try any tricks. I need certain equipment on board that ship. If you try to take it I'll have to blast you down. Agreed?"

Trinha agreed . . .

HOURS passed and the night grew late, but still Nicholas had not emerged from the ship. Hundreds of the Gdjinhji tribesmen had taken up a vigil at a respectful distance and some had even prepared jars of *grabdal*, believing that the Nrlani had arrived to do business. Trinha mingled inconspicuously with the women, easily taking up the regional pattern of conversation as though she had never left Mars and visited Panh, Guardian Star of the Twin Moons. It was a relief to her, physically, to walk under the influence of the lighter gravity of her home planet, to breathe its rarer air and feel the lightening of her blood. She preferred Mars to Earth, even if it did mean being sold, eventually, to the highest bidder. It was tribal law. But it was something she could understand. This was her home.

Suddenly, lightning seemed to flash in the sky. They all looked upward, startled, as lightning was rare. The first flash was followed by several others, and in another minute they heard thunderous reports, as of gigantic explosions. Then several long, sleek ships swept low over Zridhn Nor, glowing in pale bubbles of energy as they screened themselves from attacks emanating from higher up. A circular ship, recognizable at once as a robot controlled Nrlanian battleship, started to pursue the intruders, but suddenly it flashed blindingly into extinction not two miles away.

It was then that Nicholas emerg-

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ed from his own ship and faced them. Bewildered, they looked at him as though for an answer. Confidently, then, he walked among their campfires, one hand resting lightly on the butt of his radium pistol in his belt. Taking full advantage of his previous experience on Mars, he spoke to them in their own tongue.

"What you see above you is the answer to the warning I gave you some time ago at Druhdrui," he said. "I came among you then explaining that I was the ruler of Panh, but I warned you of the usurper, Stephen Germain, who was planning to come here and subjugate all of you. These are his ships now. He is so powerful that he challenges even the Nrlani!"

The tribesmen gasped, finding it difficult to conceive of such a power. And they were afraid. Trinha knew this was the effect Nicholas was seeking. Her eyes narrowed, recognizing in him now the same, crafty deceiver who had taken her virgin dreams on a golden platter and thrown them to a pig—Pavlovich. Her hand crept under her outer garments and closed on the cold handle of her concealed weapon.

"But I, too, have acquired new power," continued Nicholas. "I have within my hands the power to blast Panh out of the sky and destroy it forever unless it surrenders. I have come among you to organize you to defend yourselves and to aid me in occupying Panh."

Convenient to his strategy, the story of his previous appearance at Druhdrui had gone before him and gained proportions. They knew him. It was not long before one of the more prominent merchants had invited him to his trading post to eat *charnr* cheese and warm himself with *bhurra* liquor.

Excitedly, the crowd followed, and Trinha mingled with her own people. She had merely hated Nicholas on a purely personal basis until now, but his remarks concerning the possible destruction of Earth added new impetus to her intentions. She did not hate the Earth. It was a great, ponderous world teeming with billions of people who were probably as innocent of any intent to conquer and enslave as were the Gdjinhji. As for the battle going on now in Martian skies, she hoped that the Nrlani could be destroyed. She had seen Izdran, and that had been enough. She recognized the avenging ships of the Golden Guardsmen as an extended arm of the Earth people, seeking to free the entire solar system of slavery worse than death. Certainly she would trust them more than she could trust the likes of Izdran, or Nicholas and Pavlovich, or Eidelmann and his fanatic group. If these strangers in their sleek, fast ships were enemies of those she hated, then they were friends to her.

Now she knew that to bring Nicholas merely to his knees and

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see him suffer defeat would be selfish. She was going to capture him and bring him to Eidelmann, but now the picture had changed. For the sake of Earth, she thought, Nicholas would have to die . . .

* * *

THE disc had detected Germain, and now it was coming to investigate. Out here in the depths of space it was difficult to judge the size and distance of an unfamiliar object. Knowing, however, that the discs were approximately two feet in diameter at normal density, he judged this one to be about fifty feet from him, closing in slowly.

It looked exactly like a giant amoeba now, semi-transparent and with a dark nucleus, like a malignant eye, in its center. He was reminded of early spear fishing days off the coast of Southern California when he used to surprise schools of squid in the kelp beds and they had looked at him out of the dark depths with their great eyes like this—utterly alien, voiceless, resentful of his intrusion into their own element.

For the first time since his metamorphosis into a mutant, he was assailed by fear, because here, at last, was the unknown, and he did not know what to do. There was only one faint ray of hope. The other discs had confronted him en masse. This one was alone. It was a case of his mutant powers against the unknown and unmeasured powers of this alien creature that had been spawned in the deadly cold of the void or, perhaps as Borg and Grange suspected, in the fission heat of the sun's core.

They were passive by nature, but deadly when motivated. This one was apparently motivated like the rest, because it had taken an interest in him. Perhaps it was even now intent upon sucking from him his life's energies and leaving him to drift with hundreds of derelict vessels down the space road to fiery destruction.

The disc seemed close enough to touch him. He swung the air-bloated arms of his suit at it but missed it. At the same time it came nearer and he saw that it was much larger than he had anticipated. In fact, it seemed suddenly gigantic, until he realized that he was densified, measuring not more than an inch in length. This time he knew it was upon him, trying to envelop him in its substance. He swung about again, and the substance of it parted like a diaphanous web, only to reassemble itself again. It seemed more of a spiritual substance than material. A link between first and second order matter, or a manifestation of both, he could not tell.

Suddenly it had densified, too, and its substance became tougher, enveloping him in earnest. He soon began to feel that sickening drain of energy that he had felt before. He struck back with all the psychic

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power he could generate, and he was elated to notice a lessening of the deenergization. He struck again, mentally, pouring into the disc what would have shorted the nerve dendrites of ten human nervous systems.

In another moment, he was completely free, and he saw the disc drifting aimlessly away to his left, expanding slowly into a broad, ghostly, amorphous thing that was transparent against the blazing backdrop of the firmament. He had blocked its outside control. He thought swiftly. Here was pure mentality with not enough intelligence to be inhibited unless acted upon by an outside force. If he could implant in it a powerful post-suggestion it might be able to affect others of its kind and make of his hypnosis a chain reaction. But he knew that even if he succeeded it would not work fast enough. One was not enough to start with. He needed hundreds of them. But hundreds of them would mean his own defeat.

Still, this one contact with a disc had implanted in him the tiniest germ of an idea, so formless yet that he could not quite discern its final outline, but his seventh sense told him he should develop it. Something titanic in its proportions. He concentrated, trying to follow the one premise established: That the discs were pure mentality devoid of inhibiting fears or pre-conditionings. From there, where could his reasoning take him? He concentrated, knowing that he was on the trail of something of immeasurable consequence. Then he realized that this was not the time or the place for prolonged meditation, so he efficiently assigned his problem to his subconsciousness, knowing that in that indefatigable workshop the solution would be arrived at in due time and present itself without warning, whenever it was ready.

Another idea intruded at that moment, and he yelled, "Hey!" He tried, mentally, to recall the disc. It might be the means of getting him out of this orbit. His flying carpet to safety. But when he probed it, it fled, not into space, but into another plane. It attenuated into nothingness.

(To be concluded)

BY WAY OF EXPLANATION

If you've looked over the contents page, you've probably already noted that the Special Features Section is rather small this issue and that a few of the departments have been omitted. But, that same contents page will give you the reason behind this. In order to bring you the stories and articles written especially for this issue it was necessary to crowd out some of the regular features, but they'll be back again in the July OTHER WORLDS.

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An Open Letter To PAUL FAIRMAN

The May 1952 issue of IF, the new science fiction magazine, carried an article on Raymond A. Palmer under the heading "Personalities In Science Fiction". Inasmuch as it has touched off a heated controversy in the ranks of science fiction, an analysis of that article has become necessary.

THE editor of OTHER WORLDS, the same Raymond Palmer who has been so signally honored in the pages of Paul Fairman's new IF, which is a very fine magazine indeed, has read with interest the unbiased opinion of himself published therein. In replying, he will try to adopt a similarly unbiased attitude, and attempt to remain personally neutral by refraining from the pronoun I.

The article in IF is brilliantly written. Perhaps an effort should be made to marshall this reply into something approaching the same brilliance, but by the very complexity of the problems involved, it becomes necessary to take the IF article paragraph by paragraph, which may make for some incoherence in this analysis. And since all of OTHER WORLDS' readers may not have read the IF article, free use of quotations is made, for which it is assumed Mr. Fairman will forgive us.

Early in 1944, Howard Browne, then managing editor of *Amazing Stories* under Palmer, *did* throw Richard S. Shaver's first communication into the wastebasket. Since his exact remark was not recorded, let's record it here. Said Mr. Browne: "Ye Gods, what a crackpot *that* guy is! We'll file this in the wastebasket—where it belongs!"

In the next paragraph, IF makes a statement which needs to be challenged.IF says: "Palmer retrieved the letter, visualized its possibilities —possibilities which would have entirely escaped nine editors out of ten—and the so-called Shaver Mystery was born." This is as far from the truth as can be attained. Palmer did not visualize a thing. All he did was to put into action a theory of his, which is as follows: "Don't be so sure *you're* not a crackpot! It's not always the other guy who's nuts." By which no reflection is cast on Howard Browne, who is decidedly not a nut. But here was a chance to prove that Palmer theory. Just how it was going to prove it was a vague thing—since Palmer had made his decision *before* he'd read the letter! What could be more convincing proof that Palmer was not seeing possibilities that would have escaped other editors? That the Shaver Mystery resulted was a *pure accident!*

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It was also a pure accident that *Amazing's* circulation zoomed 50,000 as a result. Actually it happened this way: Mr. Harry Strong, circulation director for ZD, believed that due to the paper shortage (all ZD magazines selling out at the stands) it was rather silly to spread the paper out over *four* magazines, when *two* print jobs could sell an equal number of magazines. In so thinking, he put the kiss of death on Howard Browne's two magazines, *Mammoth Detective* and *Mammoth Mystery*. He *printed* 50,000 extra copies of *Amazing* as a test of the accuracy of his theory. He was correct: the extra 50,000 sold (due to the wartime shortage of magazines which ensured a sellout to any magazine placed on the stands". The Shaver Mystery's first story "I Remember Lemuria!" was in that issue! Let's put the record straight—it was Harry Strong who was the genius. He was the *business minded* man who knew what ten out of ten editors wouldn't have known: how to *sell* a magazine after an editor had edited it.

What Harry Strong *didn't* know, and Ray Palmer either, was that Shaver HAD something. Something more than the *fiction* Palmer wrote into his "Warning To Future Man" and called it "I Remember Lemuria!" That something was the fan mail that came in from those 50,000 extra readers (or at least from a proportion of *all* of *Amazing's* readers coincidentally equal to that 50,000 increase in sale). Ordinarily *Amazing* received between 40 and 50 letters a month. Now, suddenly, the figure jumped to 2500 a month, when the increase should have been to 60 or 70 on a percentage basis. In plain words, Palmer discovered himself on the hot end of a rather well-baked potato, and it was impossible, by reason of his original theory that it's not the other guy who's nuts, to claim either Shaver or these 2500 readers monthly as being rather shorn of their buttons. Instead he had to sew these buttons onto his shirt and wear them.

One thing, you'll never take any buttons *off* Palmer's shirt, once he's sewed them on. It isn't genius—it's just mule-headed stubborness; a type of persistence that will make him jump aboard any comet that comes along if anybody so much as ventures the opinion it's impossible to ride. Palmer likes adventure (and this was an armchair variety) which carries a real punch. The Shaver Mystery carried a punch. It blew the complacement right out of their pants. It poked fun out of the most staid of scientists, the most dogmatic of dogmatists, the most "set-in-their-ways" advocates of the sanctity of the *status-quo* (in whose presence these last words are always whispered reverently). But most of all, it offered a personal challenge to Ray Palmer, who had intended only to challenge Howard Browne. *Something* was true about Shaver's amazing warning! What was it? He in-

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tended to find out, and with him, his readers were to find out too. Palmer's magazine, his readers, his publishers, his friends—all became instruments for but one thing! the advancement of Palmer's investigation into a problem that had become the "great adventure."

Another statement IF makes regarding Palmer is not true: that his accident at the age of 7 embittered him, and that he never outgrew it. This statement would seem to indicate that the statement *is* true, since he denies "never outgrowing" it. The truth is the bitterness came much later (during his editorship of *Amazing*) and had nothing to do with accidents which crippled him, but with friends who turned out to be something else. Palmer inherently believes all people are to be trusted to the utmost; that they are all great guys—and when they let him down . . . However, that bitterness is gone now, because through the Shaver Mystery, Ray learned the reason for what Shaver calls "de" in human thought. What *is* true about Palmer's accident is that the resulting crippling gave him an enormous inferiority complex. Especially regarding the opposite sex. He felt marriage and fatherhood was denied him. That he's married now and has three children proves that he outgrew *that*. In short, the accident did not make him bitter; and he outgrew both a positive bitterness and sense of inferiority during his life.

The readers of *Amazing Stories*, thousands of whom he knows by name, and who are now readers of OTHER WORLDS, are the reason for his ability to outgrow both faults —their incredible friendship, their constant encouragement, their loyalty (some of them following his magazines for 14 years and his writing for 20) restored his faith in the fact that you *can* trust the average human being to be a great guy, all the way! And because of this, he's always trying to make his readers personal friends to as great an extent as is possible in so "officious" a position as editor.

Next, IF takes upon itself to analyze Shaver and the truth of his claims. Here IF is decidedly "stiff in a corner". First, that the Shaver stories were a "premise-frame on which to hang reams of erotic copy". IF gives Shaver's works a "Kraft-Ebbing touch that can hardly be rated as cheerful reading." It also refers to the work as "heavy sex-and-sadism flavored". Shaver's prime premise, regarding sex, was that our present civilization is a marked example of how sex can be (and is) degraded from the clean and honest and beneficial thing it really is—but *isn't* anywhere on Earth! The Kraft-Ebbings and the sex-sadism is what Shaver struck out at! That his so-called eroticism was interpreted as sex-sadism is a matter of the personal interpretation of the reader! Even today, in the pages of *Amazing*, a continual

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debate goes on as to whether or not the cover paintings are deliberate eroticism of a degrading nature, or just darn pretty girls worth looking at and getting pleasure out of the looking. Shaver got pleasure, and believed pleasure is *all* that should be gotten, out of sex. He believed, and Palmer with him, that sex, to be worthwhile, must be beautiful. In that respect, any reader who criticizes the cover of any magazine, because it contains a nude or semi-nude, is correct *if the nude is ugly.* What Shaver was trying to point out was that the reader who sees something ugly and disgusting in a beautiful nude is the actual source of the disgusting factor. It is *his* mind in which the sadism and unnatural eroticism exists. Beauty was the keynote of Shaver's sex-passages, a beauty that fought almost impossibly against the utter terror of the rest of his "message".

Shaver depicted *man* as he *really* is, behind all the lies that have been set up to hide his perfidy toward rightness and honesty and beauty. Shaver's deros are man himself! Man in whom the "de" of self-destruction and the destruction of all about him is an ingrained habit *which must be corrected or he dies!* Shaver's warning is a *real* warning. It is a 100% accurate picture of things as they are! It is a shocking expose of the dank cavern into which man's dignity has fallen. It is an allegory far more clever, far more dramatic, far more true than any ever before placed as an indictment on man—on the dero he has become, on the path toward a third world war upon which his detrimental thinking has embarked him. Few readers "got" the absolute truth of every word Shaver said in that respect. Palmer got it. Some 50,000 of *Amazing's* readers got it—in a garbled sense.

It is true that mankind cannot stand criticism. When the light glares pitilessly upon his detrimental tendencies, he seeks to destroy the criticizer. And having destroyed him, he returns to his evil ways, deluded in the belief that he is not evil. He will not "see" himself as he really is. He is mentally incapable of seeing. He is in the inescapable grip of "de". He is a dero—a *de*trimental *ro*bot, incapable of thinking *for himself.* That is the true meaning of dero. The inability to reason emphatically — only the ability to visualize anything in the light of *purely personal profit,* of complete selfishness..

Today many thousands of people are grateful to Shaver for what he has done to bring adulthood to them psychologically. For releasing them from the "Kraft-Ebbing touch", the tendency to "think backward", the inability to see themselves as others see them. Palmer himself is grateful to Shaver for a new, cleaner, more constructive outlook on life—for a *more cheerful* existence! for a positive attitude toward the future rather than a negative one.

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IF should stand in the darkest of corners for its denunciation of a truly great mind, of a constructive approach to life, of an attack on the "bad" (the word means, in Shaver's marvelous language-alphabet: "be a de"). Shaver has warned us not to "be a de", to make some effort to go to "bat" (be a te!). "Te" (the T symbol, the Cross of Christianity) is integration, constructiveness, progress. It is the whole tenet of the Shaver Mystery. It is no mystery. The only mystery is WHY does man insist on the tendency toward "de"?

And therein lies the last and final question regarding Shaver. What *actually* is the physical and real reason for this tendency? Is Shaver right? Do his caves *really* exist? *Are* we plagued by a monstrous detrimental overlordship possessed of titanic science to which we cannot but succumb? It *cannot* be that mankind *wants* to "be a de!" Then, if that is so, Shaver must be at least on the right track in seeking for a *cause*. The existence of his caves and his dero race, his departed Titans has never been proved, but similarly, it has never been disproved. He himself admits it is his *rationalization* of the reason for the "de" he sees about him.

That Shaver's own mind is completely subject to "de", as he avers, is not true. A cursory examination of his writings since 1944 mark him definitely as the greatest of all science fiction scientists. His many scientific claims, such as the actual effects of radioactivity on the human body, of gravity, of the formation of suns and planets, of the relationship between gravitation and magnetism, and so on, *ad infinitum*, have been proved to the hilt since he wrote them. Even Einstein has come out with the statement that gravity and magnetism are manifestations of the same thing. A German scientist has proven the existence of Shaver's "exd" (ex-disintegrance, or ashes of matter) out of which new matter is formed, by proving the existence of an "ether-wind" in a vertical direction, the "ether-drift" Michelson and Morley failed to find in a horizontal direction, but which Rog Phillips and Ray Palmer proved to their own satisfaction in Palmer's own basement, using the theories propounded by Shaver, That gravity is actually the "friction" of matter (exd) coming into an electro-magnetic field, and that it is a pressure and not a pull. The science of the Shaver Mystery can definitely stand on its own solid feet.

When IF laughingly states (in reference to Jesse James, Quantrell, Billy the Kid, etc) that nobody really ever dies, they are walking smack into Ray Palmer's belief that it's the other guy who is slightly daffy. Never, Mr. Fairman, say anything is "nuts" in Palmer's presence! He may make a Shaver Mystery out of you!

That neither the Shaver Mystery,

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or the identity of James Dalton as the real Jesse James can stand up under even preliminary examination is a statement that IF would do well to retract — unless IF is *willing to make those preliminary examinations*. Adopting the *scientific method* instead of the gay and airy toss-off might prove to be quite embarrassing.

Mr. Fairman, is a hoax, by defition, something that cannot be disproved? Is a thing on which all the evidence is not available, non-existent? How do you *know* that there does not exist, somewhere in the universe, a bar of soap that *will* make a woman beautiful in two weeks?

There is nothing so successful as an open mind, and that is the real secret of the "bright light, the zing, sparkle and true showmanship" of Ray Palmer. A Palmer promotion is *not* a promotion. It is the unwillingness to take a definite stand *against anything*. It is the one lesson he has learned the hard way.

Thanks, IF and Paul Fairman, for all the nice things you said about Ray Palmer. But don't tack *life* up on your editorial walls labeled "all set and explained, and nowhere else to go" because Ray's liable to turn up and "unexplain" the whole thing!

Who wants to live with everything pinned down and labeled "Don't Touch"? Ray Palmer would rather be "wrong" any day—it leaves room for improvement and advancement!

The End

THE MAN FROM TOMORROW

I WANT to thank those readers who are sending me newspaper clippings and comments on the predictions thus far made in this column. I have discovered that checking on many of the predictions is a difficult job. Inasmuch as I want *positive* proof of every prediction that comes true, and the same for each one that does not, I cannot depend on hearsay. Let us take, for instance, the predicted drop to 74 deg. below zero in the Hudson Bay area. If we had not been fortunate enough to be listening to a radio weather broadcast, we might have missed the fact that it did drop to that low in that area. Our newspapers failed to cover it. It also went to 61 deg. in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, but it did not reach that figure in Wisconsin, at least as of this writing, which is February 15, 1952. 51 deg. is the lowest of which I have proof to date.

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It is still much too early to attempt a summary of results. Such things as record snowfalls for 1951-2 cannot be listed until final figures for each area are published by the weather bureaus in the Spring. But that new records have been set in many cities is already apparent, notably Chicago. A New York reader writes to say I am all wet about New York. I hope he will provide me with fact-and-figure come Spring. Several readers have asked definite questions. Another has asked us to be more specific—by that meaning the prediction of actual events, naming persons, places, dates, etc. I want to point out that I *can't* do that deliberately. But I expect to be able to be very specific in many instances. It certainly was specific to name Harry Truman as the next president!

For the present, let's not try to keep score, but just go on predicting. In about a year, a more accurate percentage should be possible, to determine whether these predictions are better than any predictions ever made before or being made today by "professionals". I understand there is a fellow named Criswell in Hollywood who can call his shots 87% correct. If my Man From Tomorrow can't do much better than that it should be obvious that he is a fraud.

There will be no Draft in Canada for the purposes of raising an army for the defense of Europe. (Answer to a reader's question.) The U.S. Army has *already* sent a rocket to the moon! (Answer to a reader's question.) Another will be launched during the summer. Radioactive alkalies will make "hot" news during the next six months. Americans will find that UMT is a "front" for militarization of the country, and that it actually involves removal from public life (insofar as any personal activities designed toward establishing a career or profession) for a period of nine years. This will become a necessity due to the threat of unemployment to all over 45 years of age. A gradual undermining of the economy due to a constant upward "denominational" spiral will work toward a new "dollar" setup, making the old dollar worthless. Thrift will become a buy-word, it being considered safer by the "little" man to buy something of a material nature than to save money that evaporates even in safety deposit boxes. The result of this outlook will be constant price increases to maintain the economy of scarcity. The government's answer will be absolute price control and even production control. This will occur in 1953.

Grass will grow in the desert!

The peace conferences will fail.

San Francisco will be terribly damaged in an earthquake, but since it will occur during a time of great destruction due to war and storms, it will be known in History only as the Second Frisco Quake.

Vesuvius will erupt in 1953.

The Catholic Church will domin-

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ate the world, religiously and politically.

Clothing will be made from oil and coal. Farming will go to sea, with the formation of gigantic fish farms, enclosed areas where fish will be raised for food. New discoveries as to how plants grow, made through atomic tracer studies, will result in a great increase in the size of oranges, apples, pears, plums, berries. Iron ore shortages will become unimportant with the discovery that titanium can be produced cheaply and is much better for construction purposes. A "science" of psychology and the practice of a new psychiatry of "drugs" is about to be introduced, resulting within 50 years of a way of molding people to fit their environment. These "molded" people will be unable to endure a changed environment, and widespread insanity will be the result.

All of these discoveries will apply almost entirely to cities, and the gap between the way of life of city people and rural people will widen more and more, in spite of the supposed unifying influence of a mechanical civilization. This will come about due to a mutual "segregation" due to the desire of individuals unwilling to submit to strict regimentation attempting to "abandon" the so-called civilized way of living, to "return to the earth".

History tells of the virtual destruction of New York city by fire, fanned by a hurricane out of the East.

A tremendous archeological discovery will be made in Europe, whole cities being unearthed, proving the existence of a civilization more than 20,000 years old, possessing an advancement as great, if not greater, than that of the Twentieth Century.

Francis J. Spellman will become Pope.

Revolution will flare in Germany in 1953, disrupting all American plans for a Pact army against Russia.

Civil war will disrupt the United States into a group of small federations, and for a time there will be no government in Washington. One of these disturbances will involve Canada, and friendly relations will be broken off for a time. Most of the damage from these wars will be found along the Atlantic coast and along the Canadian border from Lake Erie eastward.

Finland will be placed under complete domination of the Soviet Republic.

Western Germany will be ravaged by floods in 1953 which will fill several mines and cause their collapse. Italy will suffer from tremendous earthquakes and eruptions, of which the eruption of Vesuvius will be the worst. Peculiarity of the storms that will occur simultaneously will be the terrific electrical displays, which will do much damage. Epidemics will follow.

A new undersea volcano will be born in the North Sea. This volcano will come in the Fall, before the

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first snowfall of the year. The first indication of the birth of the new volcano will be the onrush of a tremendous tidal wave which will strike first at Trondheim, then batter the English coast, destroying several cities. The city of Hull will virtually disappear and Scotland will be partly submerged for a time. None of the countries surrounding the North Sea will escape damage. Antwerp, Hamburg, Rouen, all will be struck. London's dock area will be swept away.

Atmospheric disturbances shortly following will generate the most fearful hurricane ever known, which will sweep over an area more than six thousand miles in extent. Most violent will be the blow struck at Panama. Virginia will take the next blow, and the most amazing blow will be struck at the Great Lakes region. Chicago, Minneapolis, and Milwaukee will be hard hit. A third arm of the storm will lash at Washington and New York. Giant skyscrapers will bend like reeds, some will collapse. This same branch of the storm will batter itself out at Canada's Capital. Having done all this damage, the storm will cross the Atlantic and strike indiscriminately at all the European continent. The date of this great storm is given as either 1952 or 1953. It seems likely that there will be *two* storms.

France will become Communist and engage in a war with Spain. She will be defeated.

Norway and Sweden will be defeated by Russia in the same war which takes over Finland, Norway losing some territory in the north. But at the same time, Russia will lose control of Eastern Siberia, Manchuria (due to a defection of the Chinese Communists and American bombing). In this war (late 1953) Sweden will prove her atomic science quite advanced, and before defeat, will demonstrate an atomic weapon specifically designed for use against troops in the field, and horribly effective—but too late to influence the course of the war. It will be partially due to the tremendous hurricane that the forces opposing Russia will be swept to doom. After the hurricane military operations will become impossible.

NEWS OF THE MONTH

Latest reports on what our readers are doing. Fan clubs, social events and personalities in the limelight.

The British section of science-fiction fandom—fans and professionals together—believe that creative fantasy should be actively encouraged, not merely talked about and wished-for; further, they hold that works

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of high standard should be recognized and proclaimed as such. To that end, a group of them are now launched on their Second Annual Prize Awards, consisting of a pair of trophies given to the authors of the best works of fiction and non-fiction for the year 1951.

The 1950 Awards were given to the novel *Earth Abides* and its author, George R. Stewart; and to the non-fiction volume, *The Conquest of Space,* written by Willy Ley and illustrated by Chesley Bonestell. These Awards were made in the spring of 1951 for books published the previous year. Forrest Ackerman, a Los Angeles fan attending the London science-fiction convention, accepted the Awards on behalf of his fellow Americans.

The idea that fine, original science and fantasy fiction should be sought out and recognized began with a few members of American fandom nearly twenty years ago. Ray Palmer, then an enthusiastic fan who regularly wrote for the few fan magazines of that day, founded and served as chairman of the Jules Verne Prize Club, an ambitious organization which strived mightily during its short life to improve the quality of science-fiction in the magazines of that time. The Jules Verne Prize Club offered annual Cups for the three best stories of the year. Although better magazine fiction was the goal, the club would have doubtless included books had science-fiction titles been published then as frequently as today. That was the earliest attempt to both encourage and recognize the genre.

Leslie Flood, secretary of the International Fantasy Award Committee (with headquarters in London), points out that a small group of United Kingdom fans, writers and editors sponsored and paid for the first Awards, but that this year an attempt is being made to gain wider financial support and to allow more enthusiasts to participate in the selection of the winning volumes, or films, or magazines, as the case may be. Again, last year's awards will be announced this spring.

The modus-operandi is a simple one: fans and well-wishers desiring to participate donate one dollar via International Money Order (or twice that amount in quality magazines) to the Committee. In return, the donor's name is recorded and he is mailed an entry blank together with details and list of books. There is an additional spur, in the form of a $25 prize to participants. If the six books you select as the bests of 1951 prove to be the same six named in the complete poll, the cash is yours.

Leslie Flood may be reached in care of the Fantasy Book Center, 25 Stoke Newington Road, London N-16, England.

Bob Tucker

COME TO CHICAGO IN '52

10th Anniversary World Science Fiction Convention August 30 & 31 & Sept. 1

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PERSONALS

Fans interested in Space Travel can obtain information and help investigating its various phases from the Better Life Foundation, and will also be notified of future meetings of the Space Travel Symposium Send your name and address to Alan H. Andrews, Better Life Foundation, 784 High Street, Fall River, Mass.

For sale: All stf mags except aSF from 1946 to date. Newsstand prices plus 5c per mag for postage. Needle, 50c; The Humanoids, 50c; John Carstairs, 75c; Best of '51, $2; Other Side of the Moon, $1.25. All in good, clean condition. Would like to buy '39-'40 aSF and Unknown, please quote prices. Jerry Hunter, 4612 E. New York St., Indianapolis 1, Ind. . . . *I have about 350 stf mags for sale, in good condition. Almost complete runs of '46 to '51 AS, FS, FA, SS and TWS plus many copies dating back to '39. Daniel Wish, 201 W. High, Lexington, Ky.* Bob B. Ballantyne, Box 1, Cherryville, Oreg., wants to buy a copy of FATE, Bound Volume 1. State price and condition . . . *I would like to buy issues of SS from Aug. '50 to Aug. '51; also, Oct. '51 Galaxy. Thomas S. Cantrell, Wilbur Wright Homes, Apt G-1, West Columbia, South Car* . . . Michael R. Birrell, 77 Mildenhall Drive, St. Leonards-on-Sea, Sussex, England, wants any American mags, particularly fantasy & stf. Will trade British fantasy mags or souveniers for them . . . *Ted Huggins, 1222 W. Micheltorena St, Santa Barbara, Calif. wants to know if there are any fan clubs or fans in his vicinity* . . . Can supply any British mag and some from France or Sweden in return for U.S. mags. If interested, please write Allan B. Spencer, 25 Derby Road, Southport, Lancs., England . . . *Have "Out of the Silence", "Adventures With Mermaids" and other Australian soft cover stf and fantasy items; some Br. aSF, also. Will trade for U. S. pro and fanzines. Current issues of THRILLS can be supplied. Write D. Cohen, Flat 7 "Paisley", 45 Waverly St., Bondi Junction, N.S.W., Australia* . . . Have copies of of AS, FA, TWS, FFM, Fantastic Stories, Readers Digest, Radio-Electronics, Radio News, Mechanix Illus, Popular Science and PBs. Will trade for pre June '51 Galaxy and pre April '51 aSF. Write for complete list: S. Washer, 25 Heathdale Rd, Toronto 10, Ont, Canada . . . *Cash! aSF '44, June '43, '42, '41, March to June '40. Write Charles Cherubin, 108 Field Place, NY 68, N.Y.* . . . . Wanted: Galaxy, Dec. '50, March, July, Sept & Oct. '51 and novels 2 & 7; aSF, Dec. '50, March, May & Dec '51; OW, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12 & 13. State condition and price. Del Greening, 190 Midway Ave, Camas, Wash. . . .

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T. O'Conor Sloane, Ph.D., long editor of **Amazing Stories**. From a photo in 1926 **Amazing**, drawn by Herman Von Tokken.

Robert W. Lowndes, editor of **Future** and **Science Fiction Quarterly**, is a 10-yr. veteran.

Mary Gnaedinger, 12 years editor of **Famous Fantastic Mysteries** and **Fantastic Novels**. Affectionately called "Queen of Science Fiction."

Sam Mines, present editor of **Thrilling Wonder Stories** & **Startling Stories**, who dates his interest in science fiction to 1926.

Damon Knight, former editor of **Worlds Beyond**, now a free-lance writer.

John W. Campbell, Jr., famed editor of **Astounding Science Fiction**, long a leader in the stf field.

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The People Who Make SCIENCE FICTION

This special issue of OTHER WORLDS is respectfully dedicated to the editors of science fiction, those men (and women) who have made this new type of literature what it is today. All but one of the stories in this issue are written by editors, and their work is representative of all those whom space does not permit us to include. All in all, they probably represent the most brilliant imaginations in all the world.

Hugo Gernsback, the Father of Science Fiction! The man who began it all, twenty-six years ago, by putting out *science fiction's first magazine*, **Amazing Stories.** Photo courtesy of Sam Moskowitz.

J. Francis McComas (standing) and Anthony Boucher, popular editors of **The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction.**

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